

HIGHER WAYS HIGHER THOUGHTS

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Dedicated
to the memory of
my Mom and Dad
who brought me up
and my brother
in the
Fear of the Lord.

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କମଳା ତମ ଗୁଣଗୁଣାଗୁଣା 55:8,9

God's will for His people is absolute victory. But there is no victory without a battle. Martin Luther testified, My temptations have been my masters in divinity! Matthew Henry, the great Bible Commentator said, The best of saints may be tempted to the worst of sins! John Wycliffe, the Star of Reformation, asserted, How much higher the hill is, so much is the wind there greater; so, how much higher the life is, so much stronger is the temptation of the enemy.

Temptation, being the most common and the greatest problem of Christian life, cannot be slighted. There are very few Christians who are really watchful and they are the ones who are truly triumphant. Temptation is not sin but yielding to temptation is. When we sin we start giving excuses and blaming everything and everybody. This explains the continuously defeated lives of many Christians. I was recently meditating on the temptation of Adam versus the temptations of Christ from Genesis 2 & 3 and Matthew 4 respectively. This comparative study has given me ten lessons.

1. Do not blame the circumstances.

Jesus was in the wilderness, while tempted by the devil. It was a barren desert and a wasteland of rock and sand. But Adam was in the most beautiful and fruitful garden man had ever known. It was a garden of abundance and plenty. Jesus in the wilderness had nothing to eat whereas Adam lacked nothing. Jesus overcame the temptation whereas Adam yielded to it. God wants us to be victorious whether we are in a green garden or a dry desert, whether in plenty or poverty. We are not to go under, the circumstances but live above, them.

Apostle Paul triumphantly shouts, Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?... in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life... shall be able to separate us from the love of God (Rom 8:35-39). Here is a picture of marriage. The partners have fallen in love with each other. They are unmindful of other things. They have promised to stand together in health and in sickness, in prosperity and in adversity. It's a covenant relationship bound by the cords of love. The love of Christ is greater than all other forces which work against us on earth or in the heavenlies. We will not yield to the pull and pressure of circumstances. Temptations from without have no power unless there is a corresponding desire within!

2. Do not blame lack of fellowship.

Jesus had no one with Him for fellowship and support. The wild animals were His company. He had to fight the temptations all alone. But Adam and Eve had each other for companionship and fellowship. They had each other's support to stand against the enemy. But they failed. Jesus overcame.

Several young people who leave the campus fellowship when they graduate backslide and cool off. They show lack of

fellowship as an excuse. True we are strong and safe in the warmth of fellowship of believers. But that does not release us of our individual responsibility. Each of us shall give account of himself to God (Rom 14:12). Fellowship is a great blessing but God will not wink at our failure in solitude. When due to some reason or other we are placed where we don't have other believers for fellowship, we are to be only extra careful and more alert. All that we learn in the fellowship of God's children should be put into practice while alone.

Joseph was alone while tempted. There was no fellowship in the pit or palace or prison. He had to stand alone and he took sides with God and came out triumphantly. God in His providence does put His saints in solitude at times to strengthen their muscles. We cannot always be enjoying the excitement of the Mount of Transfiguration. We cannot pitch tents up there and stay back. We will have to come down to the valley of temptation to face the reality of life. We can't escape.

3. Do not blame the succession of temptations.

Jesus overcame eventhough temptations flooded upon Him one after another. Though in Matthew 4 only three temptations are recorded, we know for sure that the devil departed from Him only until an opportune time! (Lk 4:13). A particular temptation stops or weakens when we yield. Because Jesus never yielded, the devil kept on changing his tactics and intensifying his fury. So the Bible says He was tempted in all, points. For Jesus the temptations were a series and He overcame whereas Adam failed even at the first single temptation.

Folks commonly complain, How can I withstand if temptations come one after the other? No one but Job other than Jesus has the answer for us. A messenger reported to Job that his servants were killed by the Sabians. While he was still speaking, the second messenger came with the news of his sheep burned up by a fire from God. While he was still

speaking, another came with the news of the carrying away of the camels by the Chaldeans. While he was still speaking, another brought the news of the death of his children due to the collapse of the house. Have trials or temptations visited any of us in such quick succession and awfulness? In all this Job did not sin! (Job 1:13–22). Instead of worrying, he resorted to worshipping. Instead of crying over his losses, he was crowning God with his praises. No degree of temptation justifies any degree of sin!

Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been proved, he will receive the crown! (Js 1:12).

4. Do not blame the place.

It was the Holy Spirit who led Jesus into the wilderness just as it was God who put Adam in the garden (Mt 4:1; Gen 2:15). Jesus overcame, but Adam gave in. The nature or the condition of the place cannot serve as an excuse for our failure.

Though his brothers sold away Joseph into Egypt, it was God who sent him there (Gen 45:4,5). Egypt was known for its low morality. The Egyptians wouldn't hesitate to kill a man to take away his wife (Gen 12:12). The moral decay was there at all levels. Potiphar was an officer of Pharaoh and his wife was enticing Joseph the overseer of his house (Gen 39:5–7). In such a place of debauchery, Joseph said no to sin!

Daniel is another young man to challenge us. He was taken captive to Babylon. Again where the cup of iniquity was overflowing. Idolatry, drunkenness and all sin were the norm of the society. But Daniel dared to be different. He refused the delicious but defiling dishes of the king.

I've heard many a Christian say, If only I can get a job in a Christian institution, I will... Beloved, whatever may be the type of place, if it is God who put you there, you have no excuse for your failure.

5. Do not blame your ignorance.

The commandment to Adam and Eve was specific and clear. No interpretation was necessary. It was simple and direct (Gen 2:16,17). Yet they failed. But we have no record that the Father God had told Jesus not to turn stones into bread or not to jump from the pinnacle. How did then Jesus overcome the enemy who tempted Him to do these things? He operated on the principles of God's law. He had rightly understood the mind of God so He could identify or discern the plan of Satan against God's purposes.

In the first temptation, to turn stones into bread, was a challenge of His Sonship and the sufficiency of the Scriptures. In the second temptation, to jump from the pinnacle, was a call to spectacularity and a suggestion to test God. The devil was cleverly trying to sow doubt in Christ's mind about God's ability. The third one was to attempt a short-cut method to sovereignty. Yielding to any of these would violate God's principles.

Never say, I didn't know, so I failed. God has deposited His truth in our hearts. He has written His law in our minds. He has given the all-sufficient Bible in our hands. The Holy Spirit in us is constantly teaching us what to accept and what to reject. We don't need a specific commandment for each situation. The Bible nowhere says, Thou shalt not smoke! But the principle is there | we are not to defile our body which is the temple of the Spirit; we are not to be brought under the power of any; and so on.

6. Do not blame others.

When God asked Adam whether he ate the forbidden fruit, he threw the blame on his wife. The woman whom You gave to be with me she gave me of the tree, and I ate, (Gen 3:12). To Jesus came one of the most powerful temptations through Peter. While He was speaking about how He would suffer and

be killed in Jerusalem Peter rebuked Him saying, Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!; Jesus at once recognised satanic suggestion to avoid the cross and he sharply answered Peter, Get behind Me, Satan!; (Mt 16:21-23). Jesus did not for a moment entertain the temptation just because it came through His closest associate. This is what Adam should have done when Eve gave him the fruit. Instead of saying, Get behind me, Satan,; he perhaps said, Get near me, Sweet-heart!; What a tragedy for mankind!

Temptations may be through someone we love most. It may come from the most unexpected quarter. The devil comes not in black with a horn and tail. He came to the garden as a beautiful creature. Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light, (2 Cor 11:14). Hesitate not to say no to a friend who tempts. Better displease man and please God than please man and displease God. Better grieve man and gladden God than gladden man and grieve God. Thomas Adams observed, We have many leaders into temptation, but it is our fault if we follow them. My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent; (Prov 1:10). The sin you do two by two you must pay for one by one!

7. Do not blame God.

God was more than a spiritual reality for Adam and Eve. He was their personal and literal friend, guide and provider. They could hear, the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden (Gen 3:8). God spoke to them face to face. Even while enjoying this literal and immediate presence of God, they failed. On the other hand, Jesus overcame the enemy even though angels came to minister to Him only after the devil left Him (Mt 4:11).

Never say, If only God had sent me help at that moment...; Never complain, God forsook me!; He is Immanuel and He is always with us, whether we feel, His presence or not. The throne of Grace is open day and night. God is never too busy

to help us or be interested in the smallest detail of our life. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need, (Heb 4:16). He is not a silent spectator of our temptations but our sinless sympathizer and succourer.

God is not silent when the enemy is surging. When the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord will lift up a banner against him, (Isa 59:19).

8. Do not blame your nature.

Adam and Eve failed even when they were in a state of innocence (Gen 2:25). Jesus was not in a state of innocence when He came into this world. He had the knowledge of good and evil so He could love righteousness and hate lawlessness (Heb 1:9). He had a nature like ours. Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, (Heb 2:14). He was absolutely victorious while in flesh and blood like ours!

That's my nature. How can I change it?; This is a common excuse by folks for falling into sin. But God has made ample provision through His promises and power that we may be victorious right here now on earth. His divine POWER has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness... by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious PROMISES, that through these you may be partakers of the DIVINE NATURE, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust, (2 Pet 1:3,4). God is not like the present day politicians who are heroes in promising but zeroes in performing. They promise the sky but can't even give a roof, because their resources are limited. But our God is faithful to His promises and abundant in resources. With all these promises and power to change our nature, we have no excuse whatsoever.

9. Do not blame your bodily cravings.

Jesus overcame the temptation when He was really hungry after forty days of fasting, whereas Adam and Eve failed even when they had all the fruits and vegetables at their disposal (Mt 4:2; Gen 2:16).

God has given us enough and more. We must learn to be content. Be content with your wife, your husband, your possessions, and so on. Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body (1 Cor 6:13).

God was greatly displeased when David said yes to his flesh and took another man's wife. God expressed His grief and disappointment through Nathan, I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your keeping, and gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if that had been too little, I also would have given you much more! Why have you despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in His sight? (2 Sam 12:8,9).

Don't throw the blame on your body saying the flesh is weak. That's why God has given us the Holy Spirit. If we walk in the Spirit, we shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. The Cross of Christ with the power of Resurrection is to give us victory over the passions and desires of the flesh (Gal 5:16,24).

Satan, like a fisher, baits his hook according to the appetite of the fish. He never sets a dish before men that they do not love. Beware! Thomas Kempis pointed out, Temptations discover what we are! True!

10. Do not blame Satan.

Eve threw the blame on the serpent (Gen 3:13). May be she justified herself that Satan presented a temptation that was too

much for her to resist. Good for food... pleasant to the eyes... desirable to make one wise (Gen 3:6). The temptations of Jesus in the wilderness had the same triple strength (Mt 4:4,7,10). The offer for Him was also very attractive. But He refused. Because, He knew that all that is in the world | the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life | is not of the Father but is of the world (1 Jn 2:16).

No doubt Satan is strong but that's no excuse for us because He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world (1 Jn 4:4). We ought to be victorious! Satan is a defeated foe. Christ is the Victor and Christians are to be victors, not victims of the enemy of God.

No temptation is too strong to resist. God's Word says, No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it (1 Cor 10:13).

Conclusion

Temptations will follow us till we breathe our last. Someone said, That person who is no longer tempted has long since been laid to rest! There is no order so holy, no place so secret, where there will be no temptation, said Thomas Kempis. Christ has taught us to pray, Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. God promises a safe landing but not a calm passage.

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Receive the Holy Spirit! (Jn 20:22)

A commandment as well as a promise of the Resurrected Lord! This meant everything to the disciples, because, their entire future, both life and ministry, depended on this. Without the Holy Spirit they would be orphans (Jn 14:16-18). Helpless!

Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? (Acts 19:1,2). This was the very first question Paul asked a group of disciples. Not without reason. This is still the most important question for every Christian.

The Holy Spirit is not just a force or an influence. He is God. The Bible speaks of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Just because the Holy Spirit is mentioned third among the Persons of Godhead, He doesn't become third or the least important. Never!

The Father is in Heaven. The Son is seated there at His right hand. Only the Holy Spirit is here on earth today in His total personality. Our relationship with Him determines the quality of our life. Ours is the dispensation of the Spirit.

Christians know about Christmas and Easter but sadly not enough about Pentecost. The Holy Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost. This was seven weeks after Easter. Pentecost is a Greek word meaning the fiftieth day. This was an antitype of an Old Testament festival (Ex 34:22; Lev 23:15,16; 1 Cor 15:23).

Blessings

The Bible gives various names and titles to the Holy Spirit. They are functional.

He is called the Spirit of *Holiness* (Rom 1:4). His focus on our lives is sanctification. His oft-repeated name is the Holy Spirit. He makes us holy. His fire burns out all that is ungodly in our life (Mt 3:11,12). John the Baptist called this the baptism with fire. Let free He deals with us thoroughly.

He is the Spirit of *Truth* (Jn 14:17). He is the Author as well as the Teacher of the Scriptures (2 Pet 1:20,21; Jn 14:26). He reveals to us the deep things of God. He makes us understand our inheritance from God (2 Cor 2:9-14). He is the Spirit of Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel and Knowledge (Isa 11:2). He imparts all these to us.

The Holy Spirit is also called the Spirit of *Supplication* (Zech 12:10). Who is not weak in prayer? We know not perfectly how and what to pray. He assists us in our prayers. Also He Himself makes intercession for us (Rom 8:26,27). Our faith is built up when we pray in the Spirit (Jude 20).

He is the Spirit of *Power*. The Lord Jesus Christ commanded His disciples to tarry until the power of the Spirit came on them (2 Tim 1:7; Lk 24:49). It was after the Spirit came on them that they could go everywhere as bold witnesses (Acts 1:8). Until then they were timid and fearful. Before Pentecost, at the hour of trial, Peter denied Christ and all the disciples deserted Him. But after Pentecost they stood bold like lion before mocking

and hostile crowds. They became martyr witnesses. The Lord Jesus Himself ministered in the power of the Spirit, thus giving us a pattern (Acts 10:38).

Jesus introduced the Holy Spirit as the *Comforter* or *Helper* (Jn 14:16-18). Is there anyone without problems and tears? Human comfort has serious limitations. Even when beaten and imprisoned the apostles could sing for joy (Act 16:24,25). It was the joy of the Spirit (Acts 13:50,52). No one can escape suffering. But the Spirit helps us handle suffering rightly for our profit and God's praise.

The Holy Spirit builds in us a Christlike character (2 Cor 3:18). He produces in us godly virtues as His fruit. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal 5:22,23). It is only when the Spirit fills us with God's love we can love our enemies and others selflessly (Rom 5:5).

Our most important business on earth is to do God's will (Mt 7:21). But without the Holy Spirit we can neither know God's will nor do it (Rom 8:14).

Worshipping God is our highest calling and privilege. The Father searches for true worshippers. God is a Spirit. We must worship Him in spirit and in truth (Jn 4:23,24). When Spirit-filled we break forth into singing and making melody in our hearts to the Lord (Eph 5:18-20). A new release in our spirit is realized.

The initial reception of the Spirit is called in the New Testament by various names. The Baptism in the Holy Spirit (Mt 3:11; Acts 1:5). Enduement with power from on High (Lk 24:49). Filling (Acts 2:4). Receiving (Acts 2:38; 8:15). Anointing (Acts 10:38). Yes when we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, we are anointed, filled, endued and baptized! Oh the glorious Promise of the Father! (Acts 1:4). A rightful inheritance for every child of God!

Preparation

Each of the Bible incidents where people received the Holy Spirit teaches valuable lessons.

There was an air of *expectation* and a spirit of *anticipation* amidst the disciples who were waiting in the Upper Room. They united their hearts to one purpose | to receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:13,14; 2:1). Among those who gathered was Mary the mother of Jesus (Acts 1:14). If there was one person who did not perhaps need this experience, it was she. It was by the Holy Spirit she conceived. The One in her womb was the Baptizer with the Spirit. At her very greeting Elizabeth was filled with the Spirit. Yet Mary humbly waited with others, *thirsty* to receive the Spirit baptism. She sang, He has filled the *hungry* with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty (Lk 1:53).

Persecution scattered the Jerusalem Christians. They went everywhere preaching the gospel. Philip was just a deacon but his evangelistic fervour drove him to a Samaritan city. He preached there, healed the sick and cast out demons. He baptized in water those who believed on Christ. The city experienced a great joy. The news reached Jerusalem. Immediately Peter and John visited these new believers. They found they had not yet received the Holy Spirit. So they prayed for them and laid their hands on them. And they received the Spirit. It was such a wonderful sight that Simon, a very popular magician, offered money to buy this gift of impartation (Acts 8:1-19). Look at the *openness* of the believers in Samaria. They had seen and experienced enough miracles. But they were ready to receive more from God through other ministers. They didn't get stuck to the one who led them to Christ and baptized them. They did not become hero-worshippers of Philip but were ready to receive a wider ministry from outside.

The experience of Paul is interesting. He met Christ on the road to Damascus. Instantly he submitted himself to His lord-

ship. He became blind to the material world for three days. He spent those days in total fasting and prayer. He was repenting of his past and seeking God for his future. Humorously the Lord chose not an apostle from Jerusalem, but an ordinary disciple from Damascus, to baptize this would-be great apostle and lead him to be filled with the Spirit (Acts 9:1-18). We are not to tell God how and through whom He must anoint us. We must *submit, surrender* and *yield* to His ways.

The Holy Spirit bade Peter to go to Cornelius, an Italian military official, to preach to him. Because Cornelius was a gentile, a non-Jew, Peter was hesitant. Finally he went. There at home with all relatives Cornelius was *enthusiastically* waiting to hear all that God had told Peter to preach. Even before Peter finished his sermon, the Holy Spirit fell on the gathering. This caused no small astonishment to Peter and his friends. Yes, God shows *no partiality!* This man Cornelius was very devout. His entire family was God-fearing. He helped the poor generously. Prayer was his way of life. His social standing was superb. None of these things stopped his longing to go higher and deeper with God (Acts 10).

The disciples at Ephesus honestly *accepted* their *ignorance* of the Holy Spirit. They had had the baptism of John. Now they obeyed in the believers' baptism. After this when Paul laid hands on them the Holy Spirit came on them. God bypasses those who assume to know everything. He is pleased with those who come to Him like little children (Isa 28:9).

Objections

People raise several objections to the teaching concerning the Baptism in the Spirit. I think of at least three.

It's a *denominational* experience. Lutherans speak so much about Justification. Is it then a denominational experience? Methodists preach again and again on Sanctification. Does it then become a denominational experience? Far from it!

Justification and Sanctification are Biblical truths to be experienced by everyone, irrespective of denominational affiliations. So also the Baptism with the Spirit. Just because Pentecostals emphasize it, this does not become a denominational experience. Each denomination holds on to a portion of the whole truth and we need to embrace all.

Others call the Spirit baptism a mere *emotional* or *sensational* experience. What's wrong with emotions? Love, joy, anger and sorrow are all emotions. Who does not have them | except a dead man? When I am full of love I embrace. When I am overjoyed I jump and laugh. When I am angry I shout. When I am grief-stricken I cry and weep. That's how we are made. When we are full we express. There is an outward expression for every inward experience. The sign of fullness is overflowing. We of course don't condone unseemly and disorderly behaviour under the claim that it is a manifestation of the Spirit. At the same time, is the remedy for abuse disuse or proper use? Cricket and Tennis excite people to the core. They forget themselves even while watching someone else playing. Tell me if I should not sing and shout, clap and dance, when I get drunk with the New Wine! It's better to be emotional than motionless.

Then the third objection: It is *anti-traditional*. The teaching and experience of the Spirit baptism is divisive, they say. I wonder what unity is there to destroy! No doubt, truth divides. After all it's a sword. Not all divisions are bad. The Holy Spirit blows off the superficial unity and builds up a spiritual unity that's real. Jesus joined the Jews' Feast of Tabernacles. In the middle of the feast He went up into the temple and taught. On the last day of the feast, He cried, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink." This He spoke concerning the Holy Spirit. When the people heard this saying there was immediately a dispute and a division! (Jn 7:2,14,37-43). It was the traditional Jews who crucified Christ. It is generally the traditional and ritual Christians who resist the Spirit. History repeats.

Problems

Folks encounter certain common problems while seeking the gift of the Spirit.

First, the problem of *fear*. They are very apprehensive lest they should receive a counterfeit experience. This is absolutely unfounded. Christ predicted that people would have this fear while praying for the Holy Spirit. So He said, "If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?" (Lk 11:11-13). Any comment needed for this passage?

Then the problem concerning *faith*. It is inconceivable that people think they need a greater and extraordinary faith to receive the Spirit than the one they exercised on Christ. Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are God's parallel Gifts. The disciples were not men of super-faith when they were tarrying in the upper room (Mt 28:16,17; Mk 16:14; Lk 24:41). Nothing more than a basic faith was necessary (Jn 7:39). It is after that the Holy Spirit comes on us we grow strong in faith. Faith is one of His gifts (1 Cor 12:9).

Then there is *feeling*. Each person is different in his emotional make-up. Accordingly the outward expressions will differ. Some people jump or shake or fall flat when the Spirit comes on them. But it is wrong to expect everyone to do it. Several individuals testify of an electrifying feeling under the Spirit's anointing. But for others it has been a cool and gentle experience, definite though. Fact first, faith next and feelings last. This order is important.

Tongues

Speaking in Tongues is a supernatural gift of the Holy Spirit by which a believer speaks to God in a language unknown to

him. In the ordinary speaking the mind supplies the words whereas while speaking in tongues our spirit supplies words under the Holy Spirit's prompting (1 Cor 14:14). God understands it but generally neither the speaker nor the hearers understand the meaning (v 2). Isaiah prophesied of this phenomenon (Isa 28:11,12). Jesus predicted it for the Gospel age (Mk 16:15-17). The early Christians practised it. The backslidden Church as it entered the dark ages lost it as several other truths, experiences and gifts. God is now restoring it.

There are several examples of tongues associated with the Baptism in the Spirit. The 120 disciples spoke in tongues on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:4). Paul spoke in tongues (Acts 9:17; 1 Cor 14:18). Cornelius and his family spoke in tongues (Acts 10:46). The disciples at Ephesus spoke in tongues (Acts 19:6). There must be reasons why God chose this particular gift singularly as a manifestation.

Of the nine gifts of the Spirit listed in 1 Cor 12:7-10, tongues is the one meant mainly to be used in prayer to God (1 Cor 14:2,14). Other gifts are mostly directed to function towards men. Secondly, speaking in tongues is a means of personal edification (1 Cor 14:4). We must be edified ourselves before edifying others (1 Cor 14:18,19). Thirdly, the tongue is the most important member in our body for expression. Out of the abundance of heart, the mouth speaks. Until the tongue is tamed, no perfection is possible (Js 1:26; 3:2). Perhaps God in His wisdom wants to captivate our tongue in the first place. Did not the fire from heaven come on Isaiah's tongue? Instead of judging whether or not one has received the Spirit on the basis of whether or not he speaks in tongues, we encourage people to seek this blessed devotional gift while praying for the Spirit. Tongues will not cease until we reach the perfect state (1 Cor 13:8-12).

Some Christians have real difficulty in letting their *faculties* cooperate with the promptings of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is perfectly gentle. He never forces anything on anyone. As a Dove He came on the Lamb! The pastor tells the candidate to

relax while the former is about to dip the later in the baptismal waters. If the candidate doesn't cooperate, how unseemly it looks! So also is the Spirit Baptism. On the Day of Pentecost, the Spirit gave them the utterance but they began to speak (Acts 2:4). Jesus said that those who believed would cast out demons. No demon will go if we sit where we are, simply believing! We need to act. In the same strain Jesus said that those who believed would speak in tongues. The Spirit prompts but we are to do the speaking (Mk 16:17,18).

All over the world we are witnessing a fresh outpouring of the Spirit. Denominational barriers are overcome by the Spirit's flood. The percentage of those baptized with the Spirit among Christians is increasing rapidly. Who can fold back the outstretched arm of the Lord?

How YOU can receive

Repent of your sins. Turn your back on the sinful pleasures of the world. Come to the Father.

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. He is your Saviour and Substitute. He died and rose again for you. Obey Him in water baptism. Immersion in water is a symbol of your death, burial and resurrection with Christ.

Ask God to give you the Gift of the Spirit. Pray with someone who is already baptized in the Spirit. Have a man of God lay hands on you and pray. Free yourself from your bias and prejudices. Break open your traditional mind-set. Come out of your inhibitions.

Receive the Spirit by faith. Yield yourself fully so you may be filled to overflowing. When you are filled, YOU will know that. Open your mouth and speak out as the Spirit prompts you.

Praise God for the Gift and rejoice in Him. Let your cup run over!

Undoubtedly the greatest need of the Church today is **Revival, Reformation and Restoration**. Revival brings back life and vigour, Reformation the pure doctrine and truth, and Restoration the pattern and structure to the former state. Each of these complements the other but REVIVAL is central or basic because it takes care of the rest. What is the use of doctrine or pattern without life and power?

Revivalist Leonard Ravenhill said, God's worry is not Communism or Romanism but dead formalism in the Church! We boast we are Lutherans but we are void of Luther's faith or boldness. We claim to be Wesleyan Methodists but the unction of John Wesley is unknown to us. We say we are Brethren but no brotherly love. We are proud we are Baptists but the cold water baptism has left us cold with no fire of the Spirit. We shout we are Pentecostals but we possess neither the purity nor the power of Pentecost. Jesus wrote to the Church in Sardis, 'You have a name that you are alive, but you are dead!' (Rev 3:2). We will either have revival or funeral!

A preacher friend wrote to me years ago, 'Stan, pray for Revival, preach about Revival, prepare for Revival and when

you go to sleep, dream about Revival. Then Revival will come! I cherish this counsel. But we must know what revival is and what happens when revival comes. The Bible is full of revivals. Revival under King Hezekiah, revival under Reformer Ezra and Rebuilder Nehemiah, revival in the apostolic days following Pentecost, and so on. We must study them closely. The study of other revivals in Church history is also rewarding. For example, the revival under John Wesley in Britain, that under Charles Finney in America, Jonathan Goforth in China, Evan Roberts in Wales, and so on. Lessons from these great events of spiritual awakening are precious. Unfortunately, as someone said, One thing we learn from history is that we don't learn from history!

Prophet Isaiah in his 64th chapter gives us an excellent description of and prescription for revival. Please read the entire chapter any number of times on your knees until you are soaked with it. I found in this chapter SEVEN LESSONS ON REVIVAL.

1. Revival is God-sent, Heaven-sent.

Oh, that YOU would rend the HEAVENS! (v 1)

Human efforts cannot produce revival. We cannot even plan a revival. An evangelistic crusade can be planned and these days even computer programmed. But not revival. God does use human vessels for reviving the Church but no preacher can bring a revival. Revival that comes with the preacher will go with him! Dr. James A. Stewart in his book on Welsh Revival writes his first sentence, Evan Roberts was NOT the author of Welsh Revival, it was the Holy Spirit! Mere fleshly enthusiasm can produce only Ishmaels, not Isaacs.

That which comes from God in Heaven is usually sudden! Suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting (Acts 2:2). In revival the Holy Spirit interrupts our programmes. There will be His sudden infusion and inflation.

Apostle Peter had not finished his sermon yet. While he was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell on the audience! (Acts 10:44).

Revival is a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The last day's outpouring began on the day of Pentecost. We are not living in the last days, but last minutes! We must have another Pentecost at any cost! Not for the coming of the Holy Spirit, but for His falling! (cf. Acts 8:16; 10:44).

2 Revival makes God's presence real.

That YOU would come down! That mountains might shake at Your PRESENCE... That nations may tremble at Your PRESENCE! (vv 1,2).

A couple, having heard lots about the revival in Wales, drove several miles to attend a meeting where Evan Roberts was to speak. While entering the town they asked the policeman, Where is Revival? He answered, It's right here! No doubt the Lord is in our midst whenever we gather in His Name. But in times of revival the Holy Spirit makes God's presence very real. The divided tongues of fire descending upon each of the 120 disciples at Pentecost is an example. Peter pointed to it as this which you now see and hear! (Acts 2:33). This reminds me of the 120 priests of Solomon's Temple who could not continue ministering because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of God (2 Chron 5:12-14).

Revival is a fresh manifestation of the Shekinah glory! Sometimes physical manifestations also will accompany.

When You did awesome things for which we did not look, You came down, the mountains shook at Your presence (v 3).

And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken (Acts 4:31). Today our places of gathering are taken! We need a revival. When there is no movement in our services, one wonders whether it is a church or a cemetery!

3. Revival usually follows times of self-examination and sin-confession by God's people.

You meet him who rejoices and does RIGHTEOUSNESS, who remembers You in Your ways. You are indeed angry, for we have SINNED... We are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; we all fade as a leaf, and our INIQUITIES, like the wind, have taken us away... Do not be furious, O Lord, nor remember iniquity forever, indeed please look | we all are Your people; (vv 5,6,9).

The famous revival verse has the condition | If My people will humble themselves... and turn from their wicked ways...; (2 Chron 7:14). Look at Ezra seeking God for revival: I tore my garment and my robe, and plucked out some of the hair of head and beard, and sat down astonished... that our God may enlighten our eyes and give us a measure of revival in our bondage... to revive us, to repair the house of our God, to rebuild its ruins; (Ezra 9:3-9; 10:1). The prayer of Evan Roberts before the revival at the beginning of this century was, Lord, bend the Church and bless the world!; The condition for revival promised through Prophet Joel was fasting, weeping, mourning, rending and returning!; (Joel 2:12-14,23). Then God will grant the former rain and the latter rain!; God revives the brokenhearted (Isa 57:15).

The great revival in New Hebrides island in 1949 has a great lesson. Several Christians made a commitment to pray, Lord, we will not give You rest until You make Jerusalem a praise on earth.; Nothing happened for several weeks and months of prayer until one of them, a young man, quoted Psalm 24:3-5 and led the group to confession and cleansing. Then a great revival broke out and thousands were ushered into the Kingdom. Peter told the backslidden Jews, Repent... so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord!; (Acts 3:19).

4. Revival comes in answer to importunate prayer.

God... who acts for the one who WAITS for Him... There is no one who CALLS on Your name, who stirs himself up to take hold of You... Will You restrain Yourself because of these things, O Lord? Will You hold Your peace, and afflict us very severely?; (vv 4,7,12).

In fact the entire chapter is a prayer and plea for revival. The preparation of the disciples for Pentecost was 10 days of prayer and praise (Lk 24:52,53; Acts 1:14; 2:1). Following Pentecost, again when they prayed, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:31). Cornelius is another example. He was praying to God always. It was when he was fasting and praying, he had the angelic visitation. The first message of the angel was, Your prayer has been heard!; And his entire household and close friends experienced a mighty revival! (Acts 10:2,4,24,30,31). We pray but we don't pray again; like Elijah (Js 5:17,18). How long shall we pray? Till He comes and rains righteousness on us!; (Hos 10:12). Let's not grow weary of praying for revival because things go from bad to worse. God has not given us up. His people shall never be ashamed. Let's be optimistic. The first secret of revival is prayer, the second secret is prayer and the third, prayer!

5. Revival restores joy and worship among God's people.

Your holy cities are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. Our holy and BEAUTIFUL temple, where our fathers PRAISED You, is burned up with fire; and all our PLEASANT things are laid waste; (vv 10,11).

David was a joyful worshipper. Every time someone said, Let us go into the house of the Lord,; he was extremely delighted (Psa 122:1). But the glory of the Lord departed when the people backslided. Joy was cut off from the temple. He then cried, Will You not revive us again, that Your people may rejoice in You?; (Psa 85:6). Prophet Habakkuk was filled with

questions concerning God's dealings with His people. Finally he prayed, "O Lord, revive Your work in the midst of the years!" We find him rejoicing greatly in the Lord, as we come to the end of his book, though the fields and the flock failed! (Hab 3:2,17,18). When the Holy Spirit filled the early Christians they praised God in tongues speaking of His wonderful works (Acts 2:4,11). Just like David their heart "rejoiced" and their tongue was "glad" because God made them "full of joy" in His presence (Acts 2:25-28). They were a Hallelujah gang among all the people! (Acts 2:47). There was revival in the prison also! (Acts 16:25). The chains were good enough for a clanging cymbal!

Revival turns "mourning into dancing" (Psa 30:11). First "a time to weep and mourn" | This is preparation for revival. When revival comes, it is "a time to laugh and dance" (Eccl 3:4). The way some of our worship services go makes one wonder whether we worship a living God. An Anglican Christian took another Christian for the first time to his Church service. After the service he asked the new-comer, "How was the service?" He answered, "I was *Tortured for Christ!*"

6. Revival results in explosive evangelism.

"As fire burns brushwood, as fire causes water to boil | To make Your NAME known to Your ADVERSARIES, that the NATIONS may tremble at Your presence" (v 2).

Evangelism may or may not produce revival but true revival always results in evangelism. In evangelism the preacher makes the altar call but in revival the people make it! "What shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). There were mass conversions following Pentecost. Three thousand, five thousand! Have we seen thousands being baptized in one day? In several Churches, for the whole year we have just about a dozen converts and we keep them safe to be baptized during the next annual convention! If like the early church we baptize people then and there,

even at nights, we will not have sufficient baptismal candidates during the convention to impress the visiting sponsor! We need revival!

Revival sends the saints seeking after sinners (Psa 51:12,13). The dry bones in the Church suddenly become a dynamic battalion! (Ezek 37:1-10). In Acts we read about everyone going everywhere to reach everyone for Christ. The nick name for the apostles was "world-turners"! We are just "world-tourists"! Missions are born in revival (Acts 13:2-4). History is full of it. Several Missions were born when revival broke out among the youth. The slogan of Revivalist John Wesley was, "The world is my parish"! What it usually takes to accomplish in normal evangelism in 40 years can be done in the atmosphere of revival in 40 days | even less! Revival plunders hell and populates Heaven!

7. Revival leads the Church to maturity and full surrender.

But now, O Lord, You are our FATHER; we are the CLAY, and You are our POTTER; and all we are the work of Your hand" (v 8).

Obedience to the Father as children and yieldedness into the hands of the Maker mark the character of God's people who experience a revival from Above. Love for God becomes supreme and the earthly attachments lose their significance. Without any demand or command the early Christians sold all their belongings and laid it at the apostles' feet (Acts 2:44,45; 4:32-35). Revival turns men-pleasers into God-pleasers (5:29). A new love for God's Word dawns. Christians who spent hours before television or other pastimes now find the Bible their delight day and night. Fellowship with God's people becomes more delight some than fun and food with the worldlings. Lifestyle becomes simple and giving to God is increased. All this and much more! Oh, for a revival! | NOW!

ଚକ୍ଷୁର ତା ଚାଖୁଣ୍ଟଣ ?

The worship of God is the most blessed of all earthly vocations. There is no higher or nobler task. Praising God is good... pleasant... beautiful (Psa 147:1).

To worship God is to realise the purpose for which He created us: This people I have formed for Myself; they shall declare My praise (Isa 43:21). And for which He chose us: You are a chosen generation... that you may proclaim the praises of Him (1 Pet 2:9). The first two of the Ten Commandments are about worship (Ex 20:1-6). It is also the last positive commandment in the Bible. Worship God (Rev 22:9).

Worship is Worthship

To worship God is to ascribe to Him supreme worth. It is admiring His character and delighting in His works. The old English word for worship is worthship.

William Temple gives an excellent definition: To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the

mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God. Worship is thus both a revelation and a response.

In worship we exalt God to His rightful place. I will call upon the Lord who is worthy to be praised (2 Sam 22:4).

You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power (Rev 4:11).

The realisation of God's worthiness invariably leads to the realization of our unworthiness. Here are two classic examples. David: O Lord, How excellent is Your name in all the earth... what is man that You are mindful of him? (Psa 8:1,4). Isaiah: I saw the Lord sitting on the throne... Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts... Woe is me, for I am undone! (Isa 6:1-5).

Prayer versus Praise

Prayer is to receive from God. Praise is to give to God. It is more blessed to give than to receive! When God answers our prayers we are gratified. When He accepts our praise He is glorified (Psa 50:23).

In prayer we act like men, and in praise like angels. Prayer takes us to heaven, but praise brings down heaven to us. No prayer in heaven because we will have all we need and more. But praise there will be forever. Praise is the language of heaven. Start practising it now!

In prayer we consider our need. In praise we concentrate on His nature. He is your praise (Dt 10:21). Yah, the Lord, is my Song (Isa 12:2). Pure worship transcends even thanksgiving. In the former we revere God's being while in the latter we respond to His bestowing.

It's no more the healing but the Healer. Not salvation but the Saviour. Not deliverance but the Deliverer. Not blessings but the Blesser. Worship ignores whether or not we have what we need or ask. Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines... | Yet I will rejoice in the Lord; (Hab 3:17,18).

The patriarch Job was a worshipper par excellence. Prosperity or adversity made little difference to him. When he lost everything, he fell to the ground and worshipped. He said, Blessed be the name of the Lord; (Job 1:20,21).

David prayed three times a day (Psa 55:17). But he praised God seven times! (119:164).

Praise prepares the prayer pathway. Enter into His courts with praise; (100:4) You shall call your gates Praise; (Isa 60:18). Praise escalates prayer. God inhabits our praises (Psa 22:3).

Prayer must be wrapped up in praise. The Lord's prayer begins and ends with worship (Mt 6:9,13). The early Church had learnt this secret. They began their prayer worshipping God as the Creator (Acts 4:24). We are commanded to saturate prayer with praise (Phil 4:6; Col 4:2).

Word and Worship

All Bible study must lead to worship. Mere knowledge makes one arrogant (1 Cor 8:1b). The head swells but the heart shrinks. This is the tragedy today despite so much of Biblical scholarship.

When Ezra opened the Book, the people stood up in reverence. And they bowed their heads and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground; (Neh 8:5,6). The people spent one fourth of the day in reading the Book which led to worship for another fourth (Neh 9:3).

Dry theology is the result of worshipless study. Who is a greater theologian than Paul? He breaks forth into praise while writing even a doctrinal epistle (Rom 9:5; 11:33-36; 16:27). David's meditation of God's Word led him to worship. I will worship... For You have magnified Your Word above all Your name; (138:2).

The Bible is Christocentric. In Genesis He is the Seed of the Woman. In Exodus the Passover Lamb. In Leviticus the Priest. In Numbers the Smitten Rock. And so on. In the prophetic books He is the Prince of Peace. In Matthew the King. In Mark the Servant. In Luke the Son of Man. In John the Son of God. In Acts the Lord of the Harvest. In the Epistles the Lord of the Church. And in Revelation the Lord of the Nations. The King of kings and the Lord of lords! There is enough subject for worship on every page of the Holy Writ. That is why many saints found studying the Bible on knees most meaningful.

Redemption is the Bible's central theme. The seven redemptive names of God present another beautiful array for worship. Jehovah-Jireh (Gen 22:14). Jehovah-Rapha (Ex 15:26). Jehovah-Nissi (Ex 17:15). Jehovah-Shalom (Judg 6:24). Jehovah-Rohi (Psa 23:1). Jehovah-Tsidkenu (Jer 23:6). Jehovah-Shammah (Ezek 48:35).

Worship is Work.

The philosophy of the world is, Work is worship. But God's Word teaches that worship is our primary work. It was after all for Jesus that Martha was preparing dishes. But Jesus said, Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her; (Lk 10:38-42). Yes nothing is eternal but worship.

In India they celebrate *Ayutha Pooja*. People worship tools and equipments on this day. They sacrifice to their net, and

burn incense to their dragnet, (Hab 1:16). If we Christians substitute work for worship we become guilty of the same sin.

God's primary search is for worshippers. Workers are next (Jn 4:23,35). Ministry to the Lord should precede ministry for the Lord. It was while ministering to the Lord, the first missionary call came (Acts 13:2). In worship we speak God's praise before Him, and in evangelism before people. One follows the other in this order. Only worshippers make good workers. Because, the ultimate of evangelism is to make every knee bow before Him, (Phil 2:10,11).

Worship in Warfare

Jehoshaphat's preparation for the battle against the Moabites and Ammonites was worship (2 Chron 20:18). He set singers before soldiers! Worshippers before warriors! (vv 21,22). God's method to overcome the Jericho walls of obstacles was praise (Josh 6:15,16,20).

When the enemy imprisons us with fetters of depression and despondency, let's start singing hymns to God! The very foundations of the enemy will be shaken and all chains broken! (Acts 16:25,26). The spirit of heaviness flees when we put on the garment of praise (Isa 61:3). As praise ascends the oil descends on our heads in the presence of our enemies, (Psa 23:5).

We are God's children, babes and infants. He causes praise to flow out of our mouth because of His enemies, that He may silence the enemy and the avenger, (Psa 8:2).

Physical Postures

The common Hebrew word translated worship is *shahah* which means to bow down. The Greek word is *proskyneo* meaning to prostrate.

The Bible repeatedly speaks of kneeling, bowing, standing, waving of hands, falling on the face and such postures (95:6;

Eph 3:14; Phil 2:10; Rev 7:9; Psa 134:2; Rev 11:16). These are trans-cultural. They are outward symbols of an inward attitude of gratitude, submission and reverence.

Dancing was considered an integral part of the religious ceremonies of ancient Israel. Miriam and all the women danced with timbrels (Ex 15:20). David danced before the Lord with all his might (2 Sam 6:14,16). He was least bothered about what others thought about him. He had no prestige before God to lose! (vv 21,22). People-consciousness will kill our spirit of praise.

Just like singing, dancing can be either organised or spontaneous. All expressions of creativity are from God. His gift enables us to express ourselves artistically (Ex 31:3-5).

Musicians and Singers

The first reference to music is perhaps the golden bells around the hem of Aaron's robe (Ex 28:33-35). Jingle Bells!

We are talking about 1000 voice choir. But David had a 4000 voice choir and possibly each had a musical instrument! (1 Chron 23:5). Breathtaking? We are millenniums behind David in music | with all our electronic musical instruments!

The Lord anoints music when played by dedicated musicians. David's music set the evil spirit flee from Saul (1 Sam 16:23). Music is God's idea. But it has been prostituted by Satan and merchandised by business.

The devil rejoices to see unconverted musicians and singers in our services and crusades. But God rejects praise from lips without the heart (Mt 15:7-9). Anointed singing draws sinners to the Cross. David had an Asaph (1 Chron 16:5). Moody had his Sankey and John Wesley his Charles Wesley. Billy Graham has his Beverly Shea. The emphasis is on pietism rather than on professionalism.

The Book of Psalms is actually a Book of Songs. It's filled with Amens and Alleluias. Let's be known as Amen-Alleluia folks! That's the code of Heaven (Rev 19:4). That's the new song which never gets old (Psa 33:3; 40:3).

Shouting or Silence?

Make a joyfull shout to the Lord! (100:1; 98:4). The Lord will descend from heaven with a shout (1 Thess 4:16). Heaven is a noisy place! (Rev 5:12a). We better get used to it now! Silence is rare there! (Rev 8:1).

The Church had its birth amidst sound from heaven and from earth (Acts 2:2,6). A congregation should be known for its shouts of praise. Shouts of joy and victory resound in the tents of the righteous (118:15). Otherwise it's like a cemetery! For the grave cannot praise You, death cannot sing Your praise (Isa 38:18).

The Pharisees tried to stop the disciples from shouting praise. But Jesus said that the stones would immediately cry out (Lk 19:37-40). We have modern Pharisees who don't mind shouting at each other but are bothered when people shout praises to God. But Jesus would not raise His voice to quarrel! (Isa 42:2).

This doesn't follow that there is no worship without shouting. There can be beautiful worship in moments of silence too. Be silent, all flesh, before the Lord! (Zech 2:13). Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted... (Psa 46:10).

Holy Spirit the Helper

No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:3).

They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues... the wonderful works of God (Acts 2:4,11).

The Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the Word. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God (Acts 10:44,46).

Be filled with the Spirit... singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord (Eph 5:18,19).

Undeniably God has used the Charismatic movement to restore the spirit of worship in the Church. Tozer's missing jewel of the evangelical Church is being found! There are fresh winds blowing. Renewal in worship is beginning to sweep across the world. Don't be a bystander.

Of all the nine gifts of the Spirit listed in 1 Cor 12, speaking in tongues is primarily to address God in praise and prayer (1 Cor 14:2,13-16). The other eight gifts are essentially man-ward. It is this vertical dimension that adds to the importance of tongues.

Don't Worship!

Don't worship buildings. God today does not sanctify a place but the people (1 Pet 2:5). The Samaritan woman asked Jesus *where* worship ought to be done; Jesus responded with *what* worship is (Jn 4:20-24). No importance should be attached to any place where God manifests His glory (Mk 9:5-8). Both the first martyr of the Church and the greatest apostle reiterated that God does not dwell in man-made temples but in man (Acts 7:48; 17:24; 1 Cor 3:16).

Don't bow before an altar, a cross or a crucifix. It's idolatry. The brazen serpent of Moses, a type of the Cross, became a snare for the people. King Hezekiah broke it into pieces! (2 Ki 18:4). Away with portraits and statues (Acts 17:29). God never appears in any form or figure (Dt 4:15,16). Even the apostles who had seen Jesus said, Eventhough we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer (2 Cor 5:16). God is Spirit and we must worship Him in spirit (Jn 4:24).

Don't worship human instruments God uses. God cannot share His glory with anyone (Acts 10:25,26; 14:11-15).

Don't worship angels (Col 2:18). Despite all the heavenly revelations, John committed this blunder and that twice (Rev 19:10; 22:8,9). Those blessed with visions, dreams and revelations should be extra-careful.

Gold for God!

The first occurrence of the word 'worship' is in Gen 22:5. God told Abraham to offer his only son Isaac. He implicitly and instantly obeyed. He told the young men who were with him, 'The lad and I will go yonder and WORSHIP and we will come back.' To Abraham worship meant offering to God the most precious.

When the woman poured that very costly fragrant oil on Jesus' head, the onlookers indignantly asked, 'Why this waste?' But for her it was worship! (Mt 26:6-13).

The wise men brought most precious things to worship the Baby Jesus. Gold, frankincense and myrrh! Because, they knew the baby was the King! They were 'wise' indeed! (Mt 2:1,2,11).

Tithing is not worship in the strict sense. It's just thanksgiving. It's our duty. True worship involves lavish offering. The Queen of Sheba brought gold to King Solomon. Let's offer some gold to the One greater than King Solomon!

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(କ ଶୁଣୁଅଛୁ ଶୁଣୁକହୁ ବନ୍ଧୁ)

Heavenly Father,

I worship You as the One who opens! When You open, no man or any power can shut or resist. You hold the keys. You are in control. Heavens open at Your Word. Wombs open by Your miracle. Prison doors open by Your power. Seals open by Your authority. You alone are worthy.

I come to You now, Lord, to open my Eyes, Lips, Ears, Heart and Hands, which are Yours because You have brought them by the blood of Your dear Son.

LORD, OPEN MY EYES!

Without Your touch I was blind. The god of this age had blinded my eyes (2 Cor 4:4). Now I need Your second touch (Mk 8:25). There are yet scales to fall off my eyes (Acts 9:18).

Open my eyes that I may see wondrous things from Your Word (Psa 119:18). I want not pebbles but pearls. Help me find

the treasures hidden to the natural eyes (Prov 2:4). Give me a telescopic vision to look beyond to understand Your prophecies for tomorrow. Give me a microscopic vision to search the depths of Your wisdom. Fit me with a wide angle lens to grasp Your whole counsel.

Lord open my eyes to see the angelic hosts who encamp all around me (Psa 34:7). Many times I so depend and trust on material things like the servant of the prophet that I become blind to the supernatural protection and ministry of Your angels to me (2 Ki 6:17; 5:26). Help me to keep looking up and not get lost with the things of the world. Remove all heaviness from my eyes.

Open my eyes, Lord, to comprehend Your riches. Let my eyes be enlightened that I may appreciate Your high calling, applaud the greatness of Your power and admire the riches of Your inheritance in the saints (Eph 1:17-21). May Your Holy Spirit continue to reveal to me the things You have prepared for me, which my natural eye cannot see (1 Cor 2:9,10). Let me never lose the excitement of sitting in the heavenlies.

Open my eyes to see the field which is already white for harvest (Jn 4:35). Sometimes I am so occupied with the things around me that I fail to look beyond. Give me a pioneering vision. Help me see with a moving compassion the multitudes of people without someone to show them the way (Mt 9:36). Let me never remove the missionary glasses You have given me for constant wear.

Keep anointing me with Your eye salve.

LORD, OPEN MY LIPS!

If need You speak to me the word, Ephphatha, (Mk 7:34). Loose my tongue. Activate and release my vocal organs for Your purposes. You are the God of speech, unlike the dumb idols. Your very name is the Word.

Open my lips to praise Your Name. Let the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving be offered continually to You as the fruit of my lips (Heb 13:15). I cannot worship You when my heart is empty. Fill my heart, Lord, with Yourself so I may break forth into singing and rapturous worship. Thank You for enabling me speak in tongues unknown to me. Help me to use all Your gifts to adore and exalt You. Let me not leave the privilege and honour of praising You to trees and stones (Lk 19:40).

Lord, open my lips to cry out in prayer. Help me pour my soul in intercession with my lips moved by Your Spirit, burdened and sorrowful over the barrenness in my life and ministry (1 Sam 1:12-15). Quicken me to grab every opportunity to pray, in private or public, because what is greater than the calling and privilege to pray. Let me speak less to men about my needs and problems but lift my voice to the Throne wherefrom comes my real help.

Open my lips, Lord, to proclaim Your glory and greatness. Sin and a guilty conscience have made me dumb-founded. Cleanse me and open my lips so my mouth shall show forth Your praise (Psa 51:14,15). Fill me with Your Spirit so I may speak Your Word with boldness (Acts 4:31). Give me utterance to make known the mystery of the gospel. Let me always remember I am Your ambassador or spokesman and so I cannot be silent (Eph 6:19,20).

Lord, open my lips to counsel people. Have You not made me a priest and a messenger? Will not people then seek the law from my mouth? Help me speak the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge to turn many away from iniquity and guide in the paths of righteousness (Mal 2:6,7). You have called me to be a watchman to warn folks of the danger ahead. Let me not become a dumb dog which cannot bark but loves sleep and slumber (Isa 56:10,11). Let cold hearts and weak hands receive warmth through the psalms and hymns and spiritual songs I sing for them (Eph 5:19).

Baptize my tongue with Your fire as You did for Isaiah (Isa 6:5-7).

LORD, OPEN MY EARS!

I am dull of hearing (Heb 5:11). Circumcise my ears, O Lord. Help me take a serious note of the repeated warning to take heed how I hear.

Open my ears, Lord, to hear Your written Word. Very often I get into the routine of reading the Bible without hearing from You. Help me keep my ears attentive to the Book as the people did when Ezra read from it, from morning until midday (Neh 8:3). Let me always remember that the Bible is not merely printed papers leather bound but the words therein are spirit and life (Jn 6:63).

Lord, open my ears to hear the voice of the Spirit. I remember what Jesus mentioned repeatedly in His letters to the seven Churches of Asia (Rev 2:7,11, etc.). Awaken me, Lord, morning by morning and awaken my ear so I may receive Your daily guidance and instruction (Isa 50:4,5). O God, You may speak in one way or another, in my dream or in a vision or whatever way You choose, to open my ears and seal Your instruction (Job 33:14-16). Let me never miss Your whisper.

Open my ears to the cry of the poor. I was so careless until one day I passed to meditate Proverbs 21:13, Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be heard. Help me Lord to be like Job who testified he was eyes to the blind, feet to the lame and a father to the poor (Job 29:16). You are the God of the poor. Give me Your heart and the mind of Christ to love the poor as myself.

Lord, open my ears to hear the cry of my family. Let me be sensitive to the needs of my children. I confess I become at times cruel like ostriches in the wilderness, not providing for the need of my children for the Bread of life and bread for life

(Lam 4:3,4). Thank You, Lord, for the good life-partner You have given me, but I take advantage of her quietness and patience. Forgive me, Lord. Let my ears be attentive to her every word of hint.

LORD, OPEN MY HEART!

My heart is not only crooked but also closed. It is fattened and stubborn. Break open my heart, Lord, for a broken and a contrite heart is what You will not despise but be delighted in (Psa 51:17-19).

Open my heart, Lord, to know my sins and errors. Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting (Psa 139:23,24). I often condemn and criticize others because I do not realize how desperately wicked my heart is (Jer 17:9). Almighty God, help me walk before You blamelessly (Gen 17:1).

Lord, open my heart to obey Your commandments. Let Your living, powerful and sharp Word pierce to the division of my soul and spirit and discern my thoughts and intents of the heart. Let me know there is nothing hidden from Your sight, but all things are naked and open to Your eyes to whom I must give account (Heb 4:12,13). I desire my heart break forth to pour my love to You and then it will be no more burdensome to obey Your commandments (1 Jn 5:3).

Open my heart, dear Lord, to discern between good and evil (1 Ki 3:9). I covet the largeness of heart like the sand on the sea-shore as You gave Solomon (1 Ki 4:29). Many times my judgments are wrong and I fool myself and hurt others. I pray You throw Your light into every chamber of my heart so I may know things clearly as they are. Free me from all bias and prejudice. Give me the courage to say I am wrong when I

realize so. Help me keep my heart always open lest any deceitfulness or root of bitterness finds its way in.

Lord, open my heart so I may freely fellowship with one another. My fellowship with the other children of You must be like the friendship between David and Jonathan whose souls were knit together. Let me enjoy that kind of covenant relationship. Help me open my heart to others as Jonathan took off his robe and gave it to David. Let me also give away my armour, even my sword, bow and belt (1 Sam 18:1,3,4). Bring me, Lord, out of darkness and seclusion into such transparency and trust so my fellowship with others is not nominal but real (1 Jn 1:7).

LORD, OPEN MY HANDS!

Your hands are always open. Hands of welcome and blessing. You manifested it perfectly when Your Son died with His hands open on the Cross.

Open my hands, Lord, to give liberally. How can I give a good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over if my fists are closed? (Lk 6:38). Help me always remember the words of the Lord Jesus, It is more blessed to give than to receive. (Acts 20:35). You have given us Your own Son and Your eternal Spirit. You have not withheld any good thing from us (Rom 8:32). Let my hands be swift to give and slow to grab.

Lord, open my hands to support those who are weak. Let me be like Hur and Aaron in supporting the weak and feeble brothers (Ex 17:12). Let me not substitute counsel or suggestions for extending my own hands. I should never break the bruised reed or quench the smoking flax (Mt 12:20).

Open my hands to relieve the suffering and those in pain. Let my hands be the extension of the hands of Jesus as I am a member of His Body on earth today. How He hesitated not to touch a leper though the traditions of His day would not

endorse it (Mt 8:1-3). Help me to lay hands on the sick with faith and compassion (Mk 16:18). Let me die to my prestige which prevents me from touching a suffering man on the street.

Open my hands, Lord, to help the poor and the needy. Let me never grow tired of helping the poor because You have repeatedly said that the poor will never cease from the land (Dt 15:10,11). I keep on asking and You keep on giving liberally and without reproach (Js 1:5). How then can I rebuke a poor man who asks of me more than once?

Dear Father, I lay myself at Your altar. Without You I can do nothing. Help me, I pray in Jesus, Name. Amen!;

ଚକ୍ଷୁରୀ ତା ଶ୍ରୀମନ୍ତ୍ରୀରୁ ଗୁରୁତ୍ୱପୂର୍ଣ୍ଣ ?

May be we are the terminal generation. May be we have entered the last decade of this age. If so, we are the ones who will write the last chapter of Church history. Acts 29 will be about us!

WORLD EVANGELISATION BY 2000 AD. This is the slogan of today's evangelical world. There is a renewed awareness and widespread interest in missions. Undoubtedly this is an era of missionary evangelism. The Church is waking up to fulfil its missionary responsibility. Missionary movements are accelerating their progress. New strategies are worked out. Challenging programmes are launched out. We hear the sound of going on the mulberry trees more loudly and clearly than ever.

But in the midst of hectic missionary activity it is possible to forget or slight the most important work called PRAYER. Jesus commanded His disciples to pray therefore, before commissioning them to go therefore, (Mt 9:38; 28:19).

Everyone knows and accepts that Missions are born in prayer. But if they are not run by prayer we will only end in flesh what's begun in the Spirit.

What is missionary praying?

It's praying for the five groups of people acting in the missionary story. Apostle Paul lists them in Romans 10:14,15. The Senders, the Goers, the Hearers, the Believers and the Worshipers.

1. The Senders

Strictly speaking it is the Lord of the Harvest, who sends forth labourers. But of the first batch of missionaries we read they were sent by the Holy Spirit *and* the Church (Acts 13:3,4). The laying on of hands by the leaders on Paul and Barnabas was not just formal or a ritual. They fasted and prayed, before laying hands. It shows their dead earnestness. They realised that their missionaries were soldiers in the battlefield. Fasting prayer is an open acknowledgement that the battle cannot be won by might or power but by the Spirit.

Pray that the sending churches or groups may always carry the missionaries in their heart. They should not forget the problems of the missionaries as they get caught up in their own local and personal problems. Pray for the local leaders of the missionary prayer groups to maintain a high level vision and passion so they can motivate the members for passionate prayer.

The initial enthusiasm in praying and giving may soon die out. Very few will go on with the same fervour. On one occasion no church shared with Paul concerning giving and receiving except the Philippians (Phil 4:15). Every year the Government and Companies increase the salary of their employees. Pray that the missionary senders may understand this simple principle and increase their giving substantially every year.

The senders include the executive leaders of Missions. Pray they remain sensitive to the Spirit. May the Lord give them a genuine concern for each worker in the field. Let them not use the missionaries and the field news just as tools and material for promotional work. Pray that the leaders may always realize that they are servants to the missionaries. The Spirit should guide them in all placement and transfer of missionaries. Casualness on the part of the leaders may ruin the future of the workers.

Individual Christians supporting the missionary work must constantly be constrained by the love of God. Pray that each of them be an intercessor. Tears shed at home means showers poured out in the field.

2. The Goers

Apostle Paul was a man of unusual spiritual stamina and boldness. But hear his plea: Pray always with all prayer... that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, (Eph 6:18,19).

Missionaries are not angels or supermen. They are men and women of like passions and problems. The only difference is that they chose to go and we to stay. Even amidst all friends, fellowship and feeding we struggle with our problems. By and large the missionary is a lone man in the field. His *spiritual* problems are numerous. His coworker is but a fellow-struggler! How much they need our prayer! Let,s watch and pray that they may not fall into temptation.

Pray for the missionaries, *physical* problems. Health problems due to extreme climatic conditions, poor sanitation and water supply and inadequate medical facilities are all too common. Pray for the workers, safety in travel and protection from wild animals, poisonous insects and accidents. A young missionary of an Indian Mission was recently killed in a rail

accident in Rajasthan leaving his wife whom he had married only a month ago.

Then there are *psychological* problems. Separation from children and kith and kin, hostility of the native people, misunderstanding among the coworkers, lack of fruit in the field and the like are the causes. Pray that God may grant a fresh and free spirit to the missionaries and fill them with His joy and peace unspeakable. Pray that the missionaries may not be alarmed by people like Alexander the coppersmith, (2 Tim 4:14). Our prayers will keep them bold in all situations (Acts 4:24-31).

Missionaries have adapted a simple lifestyle, yet they have *financial* problems. Making both ends meet with the allowances paid by the Mission is not always easy. There is no provision for several unforeseen expenses. Money is not everything but money matters! Not a few leave the ministry being unable to cope up with the financial stress.

We must pray for the *ministerial* problems the missionary faces. They are simply too many. Suddenly a Demas leaves the team (2 Tim 4:10). And Barnabas separates because of a dispute over a simple matter (Acts 15:36-40). Trophimus falls sick and so the team,s strength decreases (2 Tim 4:20). Let,s imagine such probable problems of the workers while we pray.

Pray that the missionary may remain sensitive to the voice of the Spirit. When the Spirit wants him to speak to an individual seeker in the desert he should not get caught up by the successful crusade in the town (Acts 8). A definition of the missionary is God,s man doing God,s work in God,s way at God,s time. Claim Psalm 32:8 on his behalf. Pray for a daily anointing on him for power and purity. He must keep knowing God as he goes making Him known. Pray and protect the missionary from all discouragement, depressions and dullness.

3. The Hearers

It is not so easy to gather a crowd to hear the gospel in villages and remote places. But people cannot believe unless they hear. Faith comes by hearing (Rom 10:17). Pray that the Lord may remove all hesitation from people to come out and hear an outsider, the missionary. The Spirit of the Lord should create an enthusiasm and interest among the people.

The god of this age has blinded people lest the light of the gospel should shine on them. Pray the Lord may open their eyes. Because of dejection the downtrodden people sometimes do not want to hear a visitor. In some villages for no reason people are prejudiced and they are indifferent to any kind of invitation to hear the gospel. The Lord should overrule such situations.

Christ has promised open doors which no man can shut. But any promise of God has to be claimed. Generally open doors and opposition go together (1 Cor 16:9).

Also there will be all kinds of distractions in the rural setting while folks listen to preaching. Suddenly some animals enter the fields and spoil the crop. A couple of village folk pick up a quarrel at the street corner. A child starts crying and the mother shouts at the child or beats him which gets everybody's attention. And so on. To hold the attention of a group of villagers for ten minutes is sometimes a big task. Pray that the attempts of the devil may be defeated.

The command of Christ is not to christianize the whole world but evangelize every creature. Every man and woman must get a fair chance to hear the gospel clearly explained. The missionary walks several kilometres to reach a village but he is disappointed when the people are not in a mood to hear him due to a festival or a funeral. Seasonal occupation like harvesting or hunting make people too busy. Some-

times the people are very welcoming but other times ununderstandably indifferent. Pray that the missionary may make best out of any situation.

Difficulty in understanding the gospel message is a very common problem of the rural hearers. Where polygamy, drunkenness, etc., are common practices, it is not easy to preach about sin. Polytheists and animists have real difficulty to accept and understand monotheism. Academic qualification is not a must to understand the gospel but the language and style of expression of the city-bred and college-trained missionary are difficult for the people. Only a few workers are talented to quickly adapt the language style and catch the thought philosophy and culture of the hearers. Pray.

Miracles attracted large crowds in the ministry of Jesus and the apostles. It is still the same today. Pray God may work miracles and perform healings through the missionaries to get audience. Pray for an unusual manifestation of power against demon-possession, witchcraft and the like.

4. The Believers

Not all soils produce the same fruit. The response to the gospel is not the same everywhere. A positive response does not necessarily mean the preacher was good and the method effective. It is not of him who wins, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy; (Rom 9:16). Reporting what happened in the house of Cornelius, Peter said that God; had granted to the Gentiles repentance to life (Acts 11: 18). At the end of their first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas reported to the Church that God; had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles (Acts 14:27). About Lydia the first European convert it is said that the Lord; opened her heart (Acts 16:14). We must pray that God saves maximum number of people. He desires all men; to be saved but we must ask (1 Tim 2:1-4).

Even when there is a stirring in the hearts of hearers, they sometimes hesitate to respond publicly due to strong community systems so prevalent in tribal areas. Decision for Christ becomes costly. The family and the community may throw them out. Even their life may be in danger. Some Missions do not baptize the respondents immediately but wait for a sizeable number to come. There are practical reasons. Missionaries primarily aim at the village leader or tribal headman. If he is converted the situation becomes easy (Mt 10:11). Pray for a sweeping work of the Spirit.

As per the constitution of our secular government anyone has freedom to practise and propagate his religion. But the anti-conversion bill is in force in certain States, where a non-Christian convert cannot be baptized unless he files an affidavit before the district Collector. The rural people known for their fear and backwardness will certainly hesitate to go before a civil authority for such formalities. Also there are disturbances and dissuasion from anti-Christian forces. We have Elymases everywhere (Acts 13:8). Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, Pray for us that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; (2 Thess 3:1,2).

Pray for mass conversions. We read of many such in the Book of Acts. Three thousand souls were saved on the Day of Pentecost (2:41). The number too soon swelled up to five thousand (4:4). There was a mass movement in the city of Samaria (8:6,12). Many believed on the Lord throughout Joppa (9:42). A great number turned to the Lord in Antioch (11:19-21). In the Pisidian Antioch almost the whole city got interested in the Gospel (13:14,44). At Thessalonica a great multitude of Greeks joined the Lord (17:1,4). And so on. Pray that our missionaries may witness a daily addition (2:47). If the early apostles had their thousands we must have our millions. Think of the population explosion! Should not conversions be proportional?

5. The Worshipers

The ultimate of missionary work is to raise a worshipping community in every village and among each people group. This is the Father's great desire (Jn 4:23). There must be a Church for every locality. Pray that all missionaries be endowed with the gift of church planting along with their gift of evangelism.

Pray that the believers get rooted and grounded in their new-found faith. The Lord should give them wisdom and knowledge to understand their high calling and inheritance in Christ (Eph 1:15-21). Nurturing the babes in Christ is both a privilege and a responsibility. The missionaries are now the shepherds. They must have all discernment and compassion to feed the sheep according to each sheep's need.

The material needs of the converts also should be taken care of. Relief and rehabilitation projects must be launched. In remote areas skilled labour is quite rare and so the missionaries come under a greater stress. Pray for World Vision, EFICOR and such relief organisations who work with Missions to uplift the people. Pray for sufficient funds.

Entering the Kingdom of God is always through tribulations (Acts 14:22). Pray that the faith of the believers may not be shaken up due to deaths or losses. Persecution should not discourage but strengthen them. Believers of the sending churches should consider the problems of the members of the new churches as that of their own. Are they not our own brothers and sisters? Our prayers should keep them from backsliding. Paul had a deep and daily concern for all the Churches (2 Cor 11:28).

Pray for native leadership to be raised (Tit 1:5). Otherwise the missionaries will not be able to pioneer into new areas. They will get stuck up in one place. The new church must

become reproductive. The gifts of the Spirit must be in free operation. Believers must be trained in personal soulwinning. The new church in the mission field should soon become a sending church. They should learn giving. Pray that these new churches stay alive and aflame, giving no room for nominalism or formalism.

Equal Share

As his part is who goes down to the battle, so shall his part be who stays by the supplies; they shall share alike, (1 Sam 30:24). Those who pray faithfully for the missionary work will be duly rewarded.

କ୍ରୀଷ୍ଟୀୟତାରେ ଉପହାସକତାକୁ କିପରି ଦୂର କରିବା ?

Fasting is one of the most unpopular spiritual exercises among modern Christians. Sermons and books on fasting are rare. There arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph, (Ex 1:8). So also there has arrived a new generation of Christians who do not know the blessedness of fasting.

The Bible abounds with examples of men and women who practised this holy art of fasting.

MOSES stayed on the mount forty days and forty nights without bread or water before he received the Ten Commandments. (Dt 9:9-11). Men throughout history have testified how fasting tremendously helped as a preparation to receive revelations and instructions from God's Word. Fasting sharpens our spiritual faculties and sets us at the right wavelength to hear from God.

DAVID wept and chastened his soul with fasting. He cried,

O God, You know my foolishness, and my sins are not hidden from you, (Psa 69:5,10). Fasting greatly aids to humble ourselves before God in repentance. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves. Christian growth means we never stop repenting. The closer we know God the more we will abhor ourselves. That was the experience of Job and scores of others whom God had already declared righteous. Job said, I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes, (Job 42:5,6).

Repentance and prayer are the most important prerequisites for revival. And fasting is an integral part of both. Blow the trumpet in Zion, Consecrate a fast. Call a sacred assembly; Gather the people, Sanctify the congregation... Then the Lord will be zealous for His land, and pity His people, (Joel 2:15-19). In all the revivals of the past, fasting prayer has played a vital role.

While EZRA was praying, confessing, weeping and bowing down before the house of God for the sins of the people, he ate no bread and drank no water (Ezra 10:1,6).

When NEHEMIAH heard that the wall of Jerusalem was broken down and its gates burned with fire, he sat down and wept, and mourned for many days. He says, I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven, (Neh 1:3,4).

Here's a picture of the Church of Christ as it is today. Walls broken, gates burnt, and the enemy having a thoroughfare. Is there not an Ezra or a Nehemiah to cry, Spare, O Lord?

While studying the prophecy of Jeremiah, DANIEL understood the time of restoration. He immediately set his face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplica-

tions, with fasting, sackcloth and ashes (Dan 9:1-3). He says, In those days I, Daniel, was mourning three full weeks. I ate no pleasant food, no meat or wine came into my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled, (10:2,3). Then came to him the glorious vision.

We Christians want great blessings but without cost. We want everything free. No doubt we cannot merit the blessings of God. But where is birth without birth pain? Who has heard such a thing? And we are in great hurry. We want everything instant. Shall the earth be made to give birth in one day? Or shall a nation be born at once? (Isa 66:7,8). Fasting does not earn God's favour but it prepares us to receive His blessings. We thus tell God we are dead earnest.

For ESTHER and her friends, fasting was a preparation for intercession before the king. Imagine a queen, and her maids fasting for three days. The Lord granted her an unusual courage. She declared, If I perish, I perish! (Esth 4:16). Days of mourning gave birth to days of merrymaking. The king granted her request. So the Jews had fight and gladness, joy and honour, (8:16). How can we have laughing without ever weeping, dancing without ever mourning? (Eccl 3:4). Jesus said, Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted, (Mt 5:4).

The king of NINEVEH commanded men as well as beasts to fast and cry to God for mercy. God was pleased with what they did and He withdrew His judgment (Jon 3:7-10). The Sword of Damocles is hanging over our cities and towns. Sin is rampant and judgment imminent. Humbling in repentance and prayer alone can avert the disaster. God is a Saviour. He is never interested to destroy those who cannot discern between their

right hand and their left, (4:11). But He demands His conditions fulfilled. If My people will humble themselves and pray... I will heal their land, (2 Chron 7:14).

Several of those who used to fast so much during their youth, during the early years of their Christian life, become quite slack and negligent in this spiritual habit in their middle age. They would say, Nowadays I am not able to fast as I used to! But Anna was a widow of 84 years! She served God with fastings and prayers night and day, (Lk 2:36,37). We don't deny there are health reasons not to fast. But in fact fasting gives rest to the digestive system and so improves health (cf Isa 58:8).

It was told of the disciples of JOHN that they fasted often, and made prayers (Lk 5:33). Oh for seminary professors and Christian leaders who will teach fasting to their students and followers by personal example!

It is easy to dismiss all these examples as belonging to the Old Testament dispensation. But even a cursory look at the New Testament will convince us that men continued enjoying the benefits of fasting in New Testament times too. In fact they realized they could not do away with it.

Beloved, fasting is not dispensational. It's a spiritual discipline for all times. That's why Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount said, WHEN you fast, and not IF you fast! (Mt 6:16). This Sermon is not a dispensational lecture of Christ. Rather it is the Magna Carta for Christian living. Jesus called fasting an act of righteousness, along with giving and praying (6:1,2,5,16). We are not saved by works of righteousness but definitely for works of righteousness (Eph 2:9,10).

The PHARISEES tithed and we teach tithing as the minimum for Christians. And they fasted twice a week (Lk 18:12). What shall be our practice? Neither tithing nor fasting is explicitly commanded in the New Testament, but who can deny their need and relevance today? These are days when what's obligatory becomes optional. That which is optional may soon become obsolete! Let's apply brakes.

There are no strict rules and regulations as to how often and how long we should fast. We are to study the Bible examples and decide for ourselves according to our desire and needs. Let's aim high!

JESUS fasted for 40 days before He began his 40 months' ministry (Lk 4:1,2). The very first recorded temptation from the devil was concerning food (v 4). He answered the devil that He was actually feasting on the Word while fasting from food. Man fell at his very first temptation | to eat! (Gen 3:11). He continues to fall primarily in that area! Gluttony is a sin we seldom talk about.

We knew why ESAU failed. He preferred the broth to the birthright (Gen 25:29-34; Heb 12:16). And for the people of ISRAEL, it was the fish, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions and the garlic, which prompted them to remember Egypt (Num 11:4,5). But JOB testified, I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food, (Job 23:12).

Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:23). No fruit is produced automatically. Life is from the Spirit but the labour is ours. Fasting strengthens self-control. We are to be temperate in all things, and that cannot exclude food. In our

race and fight we may be disqualified without this discipline (1 Cor 9:24-27).

The disciples of Jesus did not fast in the strict sense of it while He was present with them. However He said, "The days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them; then they WILL fast in those days," (Lk 5:35). Yes, those days are on us. Our Bridegroom is away in Heaven and we await His return. Let us be fasting and praying (Lk 21:34-36). When He takes us Home, we will feast with Him eternally (Rev 19:9). No more fasting then!

It is evident that the EARLY CHURCH held fasting as a regular practice. And for special functions they had special fastings. See for example how the first missionaries were sent by the Church. Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away," (Acts 13:3). There was fasting before that also and it was in that prepared atmosphere the Holy Spirit sounded the missionary call (v 2). Fasting both before and after the call! What an example! How can we exclude fasting prayer from missionary evangelism today?

Acts 14:23 is another instance to teach us how fasting should be an integral part of the life and ministry of the Church. When they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed," How do we elect and appoint our leaders in the Church? Any comparison will shame us. Let us come back to the foundations of the apostles and prophets. Let fasting be restored both to the pulpit and the pew. We need the upper room fire, not the supper room smoke! We need more of prayer meetings than planning meetings. More of fasts than feasts.

Demonic powers are let loose everywhere. Our young people are under the devil's spell. Drugs and sex abuse are his

most successful weapons of the day. We must free the captives. We must dare to dive to release the hostages. But it cannot be done except by prayer and fasting," (Mt 17:21). Fasting increases prayer power to stop the enemy's invasion.

Apostle PAUL excelled in fasting as in other disciplines of Christian life. He inaugurated his new life with three days of fasting and prayer (Acts 9:9,11). His was a godly sorrow producing repentance, not to be regretted," (2 Cor 7:10). This sorrow refused bread to his belly. About his life thereafter and ministry he wrote, "in fastings often," (2 Cor 11:27). He wept over those who had their belly for their god (Phil 3:18,19). He called them the enemies of the Cross. Christ on the Cross was denied even water.

Fasting means concentration, wrote Oswald Chambers. Paul suggests even our legitimate pleasures be set aside to give ourselves to fasting and prayer (1 Cor 7:5). How lightly we take a subject as important as this! When we give fasting its due place in our lives, windows of Heaven will open up (Isa 58:8,9).

One wonders how the Holy Spirit fell on and filled a congregation even before the sermon ended or the altar call was given. CORNELIUS was well prepared. His heart was already warmed up by fasting and prayer. When Peter began to speak, it got fired up! (Acts 10:30,44). No push and pull from the pulpit will be necessary if the preacher and the people come to the church with fasting and prayer. Worship will be spontaneous. Jokes and entertainments will no longer be necessary to keep the congregation awake. Gifts of the Spirit will gloriously operate.

The unexpected will not be unusual. Revelations will abound. Every gathering will be better and newer!

How many churches do have regular days of fasting and prayer? How many attend? Don't folks apply for leave for festivity and picnics? Why not for fasting and prayer? The strength of a congregation is measured not by the Sunday morning gathering but by the attendance in the mid-week prayer meeting. Once in a blue moon we hold a 3-hour fasting prayer and that with a coffee and tea in between! Lord, Have mercy on us!

Any spiritual discipline can be abused. Fasting is no exception. Both in the OT and NT we have severe warnings against hypocritical fasting. A few sample passages |

In the day of your fast you find pleasure... Indeed you fast for strife and debate... to make your voice heard on high... Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness... To share your bread with the hungry... and not hide yourself from your own flesh? (Isa 58:3-7). Fasting for purely selfish motives, with absolutely no concern for the oppressed and the needy, is condemned here. A religion that does no good to others is no good. Devotion to God and duty to fellowmen are two sides of the same coin.

Jesus condemned fasting that became a mere show-off. He said, When you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward (Mt 6:16). The secret of prayer is praying in secret (vv 5,6). So also the secret of fasting is fasting in secret. The Father who watches us in secret will reward us on the stage.

If you fast regularly, this promise is yours: The fast of the fourth month, the fast of the fifth, the fast of the seventh and the fast of the tenth shall be joy and gladness and CHEERFUL FEASTS! (Zech 8:19).

Behold! My Servant!

The Father God presents Jesus Christ several times like this in the prophetic Scriptures (Isa 42:1; 52:13; Zech 3:8). Jesus is God's perfect Model for our service. To be like Him is the Father's greatest desire concerning each of us.

God works all things together towards that good purpose of conforming us to the image of His Son (Rom 8:28,29). The ministry of the Holy Spirit is to transform us into that image (2 Cor 3:18). The challenge of apostle Paul was, Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ (1 Cor 11:1). The purpose of the five-fold ministry in the Church is to grow every Christian to the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph 4:11-13).

We dare not settle down for anything less than the model presented by Christ. He said, Follow Me! As we follow or copy Him, He makes and moulds us to be servants after God's sort, God's desire.

We must study and meditate the four gospels frequently. It is there we trace the footsteps of the Master. He took the form of a servant, and demonstrated for us how to serve people. It's a life-time study but we consider here five of His outstanding characteristics as a Servant.

1. His love for individuals

No one was perhaps busier than Jesus in His times. His schedule was tight and the time short. His fame spread out fast and multitudes were after Him. But His love for individuals remained the same. He never failed to realise the worth of each man and each woman.

Take for example the John's Gospel. In the first chapter we see Him making personal contacts with Peter, Philip and Nathanael. He makes specific promises to Nathanael. In chapter two the Lord spends time with the servants at a wedding. He is found in patient and long conversation with Nicodemus in the third chapter though it was night, the resting time. There was no food and amidst journey tiredness He was after winning the soul of that Samaritan woman, in chapter four. The next chapter opens up with the Lord ministering to a helpless paralytic. Study the other chapters yourself. Even on the Cross He was winning a person for Paradise!

To emphasize the importance and value of each individual, Jesus gave three parables one after the other (Lk 15). The shepherd loses one of the hundred sheep. He does not stay back saying it is after all one that is lost. When he finds the lost sheep he disturbs everyone to rejoice with him. The woman loses one of her ten silver coins. She sweeps the whole house to find it. When she finds it she calls all her friends to share her excitement and joy. Then comes the father whose younger son gets lost. What a joy when the boy comes back. Even if the elder son refuses to come in, the celebration goes on! The preciousness of each lost soul!

For the shepherd the percentage of loss was just one, for the woman it was ten and for the father it was fifty. That's immaterial. Each person is important. The 99 sheep intact should not satisfy and stop us from going after the one that is lost. We will accomplish little in our ministry until we understand the value of individuals. The news of one repentant sinner makes angels dance! Are we so excited?

A large crowd followed Jesus as He passed through Jericho (Lk 19). There was a seeker in that city. He had all the money he wanted but no peace and joy. Forgetting his position as a chief tax-collector, he climbed up a tree to see Jesus. Before he saw Jesus, Jesus saw him. He wanted to just see Jesus but Jesus wanted to stay with him. Greatest surprise! In the midst of a crowded programme Jesus took time to stay with Zacchaeus. What love for the seekers!

Here is a definition of a servant: One who goes to seek and to save that which is lost! (Lk 19:10).

India is a land of seekers. God is the loser and man is the lost. The loser should go in search of the lost. Unfortunately our religions are driving the lost to seek the loser. The result is the invention of 330 millions of gods and goddesses. But the Bible speaks of God seeking man. Jesus is the Seeker-Saviour.

We have seekers everywhere, in all walks of life. Man is in continuous search, not knowing that God has already revealed Himself. Let's give that Good News to everyone we meet. Their position in society does not change or diminish people's search for true peace and joy. The prison officer at Philippi was there to punish and change the prisoners. But he was not changed himself. He fell at the feet of the preacher-prisoners crying, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' (Acts 16:30). In the same chapter we meet a business woman. Sitting on the river bed she listened to the open-air preachers and was converted. Think, she was the first European convert!

Let's learn to love and value each person. That's the first step in becoming a Christlike servant.

2. His concern for the unreached

And *other sheep* I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; (Jn 10:16).

This concern for the *other sheep*; constantly kept our Lord on the move. He refused to stay at one place. Even success in ministry in one locality did not dim His vision for the regions beyond. When the people at Capernaum witnessed great miracles of healing and deliverance from demon-possession, they tried to keep Him from leaving them. But He said to them, I must preach the Kingdom of God to the *other cities* also, because for this purpose I have been sent; (Lk 4:42,43).

While His disciples had gone away to buy food, Jesus was conversing with a woman of Samaria about eternal life. With enthusiasm and excitement she brought a whole lot of people from her city to hear Jesus. As they were coming yonder, Jesus told His disciples, Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!; (Jn 4:35). The team had a rich harvest during their two day stay over there (vv 39-41).

We must learn to look beyond. We should not keep on evangelising the evangelized. There are millions and millions sitting in darkness and midnight gloom. They are awaiting their first opportunity to hear the gospel.

With Baby Jesus in his arms, Simeon blessed God saying, My eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of *all peoples*, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles; (Lk 2:31,32). Notice how the apostles applied a Messianic promise to themselves: The Lord has commanded us: I have set you to be a light to the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth; (Acts 13:47; Isa 49:6).

Untold millions are still untold and untold millions are outside the fold. Do we care?

Paul was a fan of Jesus. He copied Him meticulously. He shared the concern of his Lord for the unsaved, unreached, unevangelized, unchurched. He wrote to the believers in Rome, I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named,... but as it is written: To whom He was *not announced*, they shall see; and those who have *not heard* shall understand; (Rom 15:20,21).

India is eighty percent rural. Most of its 600,000 villages do not have a Christian witness. When there are entire taluks and districts without a single church of any denomination, how is it right for us to open a branch church of our denomination where there are already half a dozen churches? How do we justify this unscriptural and un-Christlike act? If Jesus and Paul were to visit India today, imagine where they would be preaching. In Purasawalkam or in Phulbani? In Palayamkottai or in Pathankot?

Do you know Jesus?; asks the missionary. The tribal man answers, He is not here, please try in the next village. Dear brothers and sisters, who is responsible for this total ignorance of our rural masses? How shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent?; (Rom 10:14,15). Let's go. Let's send.

Almost every month a new book rolls off the press on the book of Revelation. But there is very little practical comment on verse nine of chapter seven. What are we to do *today* so that innumerable multitudes of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues; would stand before the Lamb in *eternity* worshipping Him? This verse in the last book of the Bible deserves our most serious attention and action. Let's not forget the more than 2000 languages without the Bible.

Jesus commenced missionary evangelism and the early church continued it faithfully following His footsteps. (Acts 1:1,2). Shall we model our ministries also after the same pattern and complete this glorious task of reaching everyone who is unreached?

3. His spirit of sacrifice

Servanthood and sacrifice were synonymous to Jesus. He could not think of one without the other. Dare we?

I am the good Shepherd. The good Shepherd gives His life for the sheep, (Jn 10:11). There's no other way to serve and save the sheep.

Christian ministry is not a forced labour but a friendly service which involves and includes sacrifice. Jesus said, Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends, (Jn 15:13). Ministry that costs nothing accomplishes nothing.

There are atleast three things we must sacrifice if we are to do a service that pleases God and blesses people.

Our *prestige*. Being in the form of God, He did not consider it a robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, (Phil 2:6,7). We cannot serve people until and unless we come down from our so-called prestige and position to identify and intermingle with them. The sinless Saviour became the Friend of Sinners. Every Christian must earn this nick name.

Preaching from a pulpit is not superior to distributing tracts in street corners. Writing books is not higher than colportage evangelism. Being a Mission executive is not nobler than working as a missionary among jungle-dwellers. Laying hands on a person's head is not more dignified than washing his feet. We

are suffering from distorted values in Christendom today. Any form of Christian service is worthy of highest honour. We must be ashamed only to commit sin.

Our *pleasure*. Jesus that day was so tired and hungry. But He was winning souls. His hunger was more for folks than for food. He told His disciples, I have food to eat of which you do not know... My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work, (Jn 4:32-34).

Prophet Amos pronounces woe on the lazy Zionists. They lie on the beds of ivory, stretch out on their couches, eat lambs from the flock and calves from the stall, chant to the sound of stringed instruments, invent for themselves musical instruments like David, drink wine from bowls and anoint themselves with the best ointments, but! But are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph!; (Am 6:4-6). Joseph typifies those in bondage and slavery. Constrained by the love of God for these people we should come out of our seats of luxury and chambers of pleasures to save them.

When 83 persons die every minute and most of them slide into a Christless eternity, it is not too much for us to even sacrifice some of our legitimate pleasures. Brothers, the time is short, so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none... those who use this world as not misusing it, (1 Cor 7:29-31).

Thirdly, our *possessions*. Jesus was rich but He became poor to make us rich. So also we must open up our purses and give away our money liberally so the poor may have the gospel.

Jesus profusely appreciated the widow's mites and Mary's perfume. Because, both meant sacrifice. We must give until it affects us. Andrew Murray said, We ask how much a man gives; Christ asks how much he keeps!;

The Cross is the symbol of the greatest sacrifice in history. We hang it on our neck or use it as a tie-pin. Let's not forget its true meaning.

4. His dependence on the Holy Spirit

In these days when so much of Christian activity is carried out by mere human strength and skill, we need to have a fresh look at Jesus to learn how He ministered.

Luke, a doctor as well as a historian, explains the secret of Christ's ministry: God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good (Acts 10:38). Jesus emptied Himself of all His own power and strength and received the power of the Spirit, thus giving us a pattern.

The Word of the Lord to one of His servants of old was, Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord of Hosts (Zech 4:6). The sooner we learn this truth the better.

Christ's dependence on the Spirit was manifested by the fact that prayer was His top priority. He spent 40 days in fasting and prayer before His 40 months of public ministry. He came out from the wilderness in the power of the Spirit (Lk 4:14). Today this wilderness experience is substituted by an academic degree. No wonder we accomplish little. Even when He became popular and great multitudes came to hear and to be healed by Him, Jesus often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed (Lk 5:15,16). When the battery runs down the car becomes a push model. An hour a day alone with God is but a minimum.

Jesus commenced His ministry in prayer. He carried it on by prayer. He consummated it in prayer (In Gethsemane and at Golgotha). He now continues praying (He ever lives to make intercession | Heb 7:25). Do we attempt to fulfill our ministry any other way?

Prayer is an acknowledgment of our insufficiency. Prayer tells God we need Him and the power of His Spirit. Leonard Ravenhill writes, The self-sufficient do not pray, the self-satisfied will not pray, the self-righteous cannot pray!

5. His sense of urgency

I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night comes when no one can work (Jn 9:4).

We must be gripped and possessed by this spirit of Jesus. He had no time to waste. So much had to be accomplished in so short a time. He had just a little over three years for His public ministry. There was no panicking at His death. On the other hand He triumphantly declared, It's finished! What a model!

We need rest but we can't relax. Not less than 1,20,000 persons die each day. Floods, earthquakes and other calamities claim thousands and thousands of lives. Some countries are closing the door but many others are opening the door for evangelism. This is a day of opportunity. The Lord of the Harvest is perhaps giving the Church the last chance to gather in the grains. If we delay, the harvest will waste. Let's hurry up!

The very reason for the delay in the Second Coming of Christ is that the Lord is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance (2 Pet 3:9). Jesus said, This gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in all the world... and then the end will come (Mt 24:14).

Let's not postpone to tomorrow what we can do today. Tomorrow is not ours. We do not know what will happen tomorrow (Prov 27:1). Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation (2 Cor 6:2). To preach the gospel. To plant churches everywhere. To prepare a people ready for the Lord.

In Capernaum the Lord had a wonderful reception. But in Nazareth the people rejected Him. Nothing discouraged Him. He kept on going. He kept on preaching. He kept on spreading the message of the Kingdom. So should we. Give a serving to seven, and also to eight, for you do not know what evil will be on the earth... In the morning sow your seed, and in the evening do not withhold your hand; for you do not know which will prosper (Eccl 11:2,6).

Let's give ourselves to non-stop evangelism until the last person is reached. We should not end our work until we witness to the ends of the earth or our life is ended, whichever comes first! Jesus sat down only after He finished His work. Let's not sit until the job is done!

କୃଷି କୃଷକ ଯେଉଁଠି ଶୁଣିବାକୁ ଉପସ୍ଥାନ କରନ୍ତି ?

No one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him (Jn 3:2). These words of Nicodemus to Jesus reflect the age-old Hebrew thinking.

Yes, Jehovah is a God of miracles! The very constitution of the nation of Israel was in an atmosphere of signs and wonders. The people of God witnessed mighty miracles of His outstretched arm in Egypt, in the Red Sea and in the Wilderness. But when they went astray from God, miracles became rare. Once Gideon asked the Angel of the Lord who appeared to him, If the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about? (Judg 6:13).

As for God, He has never changed. His power is still the same. But there are those who argue that the days of miracles are past. Yes, for them! According to one's faith it shall be unto him! If we believe, we shall see the glory of God (Jn 11:40).

Miracles are a means of God to reveal His glory. Commenting on the first miracle of Jesus, John writes, "This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; (Jn 2:11). As a result of the miracles through Paul in Asia, the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified; (Acts 19:17).

The very name of Jesus is Wonderful; (Isa 9:6). Miracles were the order of His ministry. When John the Baptist wanted to check whether Jesus was the Messiah or had they to look for another, this was Jesus; reply: "The blind receive their sight and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up...; (Mt 11:5). In his inaugural address on the Day of Pentecost, Peter presented Jesus of Nazareth as "a Man attested by God by miracles, wonders and signs; (Acts 2:22).

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever!; (Heb 13:8). The Church is His Body. We are the Church. So we are His feet. We are His hands. What He did on earth 2000 years ago, He can and will do today through us. He promised, "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father; (Jn 14:12). Faith is the key.

When the Church loses its dynamic faith, it becomes a monument, no more a movement. It becomes joyless and helpless. All its ceremonies, however beautiful, cannot help a man lying paralysed at its gate (Acts 3:2). It was an awful sight at the Beautiful; gate! But two men bathed afresh in Pentecostal power changed a sad history of 40 years!

We often warn the Church of its **Pharisaical** attitude | that better-than-thou spirit (Jn 9:34). The Church also has lots of **Sadducees** | those who deny all that's miraculous and supernatural (Acts 23:7,8). One of the most common names in Acts for the saints is BELIEVERS (Acts 5:14). That is, those who

believe in the Word of God; and the Power of God; When we leave out one or the other we become SEMI-BELIEVERS! (Mt 22:23-29).

A fresh understanding of who our God is, is necessary. Because, only those who know their God shall be strong and carry out great exploits; (Dan 11:32). God does great things past finding out, yes, wonders without number; (Job 9:10).

Who is so great a God as our God? You are the God who does wonders; You have declared Your strength among the peoples; (Psa 77:13,14). He alone does great wonders; (136:4).

William Carey shouted, "Expect great things from God; Attempt great things for God!; We expect but don't attempt! The disciples asked the Lord what they must do to work the works of God. Jesus answered, "Believe!;

With God all things are possible (Lk 1:37). Imp means devil and he alone implants the word "imp-ossible; in our minds. He is a liar. Ask not, "Can God?; Affirm, "God can!;

God has appointed these in the Church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues; (1 Cor 12:28). We freely talk about "teachers; and "administrations; Why not about "miracles; and "healings?; Why this partiality to the Scriptures?

Again, from the list of the nine gifts of the Spirit in 1 Cor 12:7-10 we pick up "Wisdom; "Knowledge; and "Faith; but put aside the rest. This is how we miss the "whole counsel; of God. Scriptures are not to be interpreted according to our convenience and condition.

If we don't have miracles, signs and wonders as in the days of the apostles, we are not to immediately conclude that God has withdrawn them. On the other hand, we must cry out, "We

do not see our signs; There is no longer any prophet; nor is there any among us who knows how long. O God, how long will the adversary reproach? (Psa 74:9,10).

We don't have miracles because we have learnt to live without them. The early Church did not have all the modern equipments and facilities we use. They solely depended on the power of God. They had no magazine or media to advertise. Miracles were their unpaid agents!

What shall we do to these men? For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident... and we cannot deny it (Acts 4:16). When will our Churches earn such a testimony?

Let's repent of our unbelief. Let's shed down our unscriptural traditions. Let's throw away our meaningless ceremonies. Let's return from our backsliding. Let's rend our heart. Let's reconcile with God. The promise is: Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you (Josh 3:5).

Let's pray like the early Church for our preachers and missionaries: Lord, grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the Name of Your holy servant Jesus (Acts 4:29,30). Then the Lord will work with them and confirm the Word through the accompanying signs (Mk 16:20; Acts 14:3).

We call ourselves apostolic. Well, where is the apostolic power? Where are the things that mark an apostle | signs, wonders and miracles? (2 Cor 12:12). It is not enough to be apostolic in doctrine alone. We must be apostolic in deeds also. Doctrine without deeds becomes an useless dogma. It's like a mouth full of sand. The first book of the Church is called ACTS. But we have only WORDS! | in plenty!

Very few chapters in Acts are without a miracle. Even in a breadbreaking service there was a dead-raising sign! (Acts

20:7-12). Let our Church life and evangelism be characterized by miracles. There is no Amen, in the Book of Acts (28:31). It's not over. Acts are to continue!

Luke writes again and again that MANY wonders and signs were done through the apostles (Acts 2:43; 5:12; 15:12). Lord, give us atleast SOME of them! But He has actually promised that the end would be MORE glorious than the beginning. The glory of the latter temple shall be GREATER than that of the former.

The testimonies we hear these days are mostly of healing from head ache and hip ache. We must have miracles of born-blind seeing, stone-deaf hearing, dumb speaking, lame walking, lepers being cleansed and so on. But these won't happen until we give ourselves to desperate praying with fasting (Mt 17:19-21). Also God should be able to trust us. He must know for sure that we have learnt to give Him all the glory. An early saint prayed, Lord, help me never touch Your glory!

The Bible is filled with the stories of ordinary men through whom God accomplished extraordinary things. Moses divided the Red Sea. Where is the God of Moses? Joshua stopped the Sun and the Moon. Where is the God of Joshua? Elijah brought fire from Heaven. Where is the God of Elijah? Daniel stopped the mouth of lions. Where is the God of Daniel? And where is the God of Hebrews eleven? As we approach the end of the end-time, we can expect even greater miracles (Joel 2:28-30).

Since Pentecost, miracles were not done by the apostles only. Stephen and Philip were chosen just to serve tables. But Stephen full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did (Acts 6:8; 8:6).

Every believer can expect God to work miracles through him. Sink into your heart this promise of Jesus: He who believes and is baptized will be saved... And these signs will

follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover; (Mk 16:15-18). The secret is going forth and acting on God's Word!

The whole Church should be involved in the healing ministry of Christ. Pray for one another, that you may be healed; (Jn 5:16). Pastors should take their congregations to rural situations and give them opportunity to pray for the sick and cast out demons. Then the dormant faith and the latent gifts in them will manifest. How will anyone know he has the gift of healing unless he lays hands on the sick and prays? How will anyone know he has the gift of working of miracles unless he prays over difficult cases and hard situations?

The gifts of the Spirit are not trophies to be preserved in the museum of the Church, but tools to be used in the marketplace of the world. They are utilitarian.

We are called to proclaim His salvation daily to the ends of the earth. So great a salvation... God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit; (Heb 2:3,4).

There is no need to be worried about the miracles done through magic and demonic powers. They will always be there. But the rod of Aaron will devour the rods of the magicians! (Ex 7:10-12). Sorcerers like Simon and Elymas will be silenced! (Acts 8:13). Believer friend, take heart! He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world; (1 Jn 4:4).

Our land is increasing in the practice of magic, witchcraft and the like. Let's pray for an unusual manifestation of God's power as in Acts 19:19. Then the Word of the Lord shall grow mightily and prevail. Mere arguments against mystical cults won't help. We do lot of discussions, but there must be a

demonstration of the Spirit's power (1 Cor 2:4,5). Money, methods and machinery are only secondary in spreading the gospel. Miracles do the job fastest.

Let's not be discouraged over failures. Not everyone who is preached to is saved. So also not everyone who is prayed for will be healed. Keep on preaching | to the sinners! Keep on praying | for the sick!

Not all those who get healed may turn to the Lord. There are people who continue in their ungodliness and idolatry even after receiving a miracle from God (Jn 12:37). We need not consider this a failure. Our God is generous. He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust; (Mt 5:45). We must aim at people's conversion but our attitude should be one of compassion.

Miracles are the best crowd-pullers. A great multitude followed Him, because they saw His signs; (Jn 6:2). This is still true today. Science or technology cannot quench the thirst in man to witness and experience the supernatural. Miracles in the Name of Jesus testify to His resurrection (Acts 3:14-16). They tell the world that He is alive. In one of the healing campaigns, a volunteer was wearing a T-shirt with the slogan, If your God is dead, try mine!;

Preaching the gospel with accompanying signs and wonders is the norm of New Testament evangelism. As we saw earlier, there are some who preach the Word but are totally silent about signs and wonders. Others give all their attention to working of miracles and leave out sound and solid preaching. Both are extremes to be avoided. A happy marriage between the two will bless us with days of apostolic evangelism. Jesus said, Preach the gospel and heal the sick!

No doubt salvation of the soul is the greatest of all miracles. But Christ is the Lord and Saviour of the body too (1 Cor 6:13; Eph 5:23). He bore on the cross not only our sins but also our sicknesses (Isa 53:4,5; Mt 8:16,17).

Of course one may ask here, Why always talk about physiological miracles? How about physical miracles? A close look at the ministry of Jesus reveals that miracles like turning water into wine or multiplying bread and fish were not an everyday affair. On the other hand, miracles of healing were plenty and regular. Same will be the case today. Only when the situation demands it, God will grant miracles that will bypass natural laws.

Anti-Christian forces are erupting all over India. Christian workers and missionaries are intimidated. We must witness the manifestation of God's power more than ever. When the enemy comes in like a flood, will not the Spirit of the Lord raise up a banner against him? Let's cooperate with God. Let's arise and put on His strength. The Lord will take away all our reproach. He will prove that He alone is God and there is no other. His promise is: My people shall never be put to shame... Fear not! (Joel 2:27,21). Miracles will terrorize even top leaders and politicians if they are anti-Christian (Jn 11:47,48). They will be changed (Dan 6:26,27).

Let's remove from the way all the hurdles for miracles and signs. One is *negativism*. We spend more time with Mathew 7:21-23 than with Mark 16:17,18. We will miss the real if we keep thinking about the counterfeit all the time.

Malpractices in healing ministries and excessive emphasis on material prosperity have upset some fair-minded evangelical Christians. They have become totally antagonized towards signs and wonders. However, the remedy for misuse is not disuse but right use. Let's not throw out the baby with the bath water!

It's futile to fight against the miraculous. With all their hypocrisy, the doctrine of the Pharisees was, Let us not fight against God (Acts 23:9). Gamaliel, a notable Pharisee, told the persecutors of the apostles, If it is of God, you cannot overthrow it | lest you even be found to fight against God (Acts 5:34,39).

Also we suffer from *groupism*. John stopped someone from casting out demons just because that person didn't belong to their group. But Jesus said, Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me. For he who is not against us is on our side (Mk 9:38-40).

Then there is *hierarchism*. We shun and don't encourage if someone who is neither a leader nor an elder is used of the Lord to work miracles. Moses rebuked Joshua for this attitude (Num 11:24-30). When young people report of exciting things witnessed in their outreach programmes the elders and leaders must be thrilled, otherwise the youth will be chilled. When the seventy returned with joy over their experiences of demon casting, Jesus rejoiced! (Lk 10:17,21). Oh for such leaders!

Our liberal theologians are injecting *naturalism* into our veins without our knowledge. Beware! They explain away or spiritualize all the miracles in the Bible. After the miracle of feeding the five thousand with five loaves and two fish was narrated, a child asked the teacher, How is it possible? The teacher answered, Those loaves were quite big. The child asked back, Why should a little boy carry big loaves?

While Jeremiah was weeping over the backslidden Israel, God asked him, Is there anything too hard for Me? The prophet had a ready answer, There is nothing too hard for You! (Jer 32:27,17). What is ours?

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Can a revival die? Yes! Revival means fires falling from Heaven. Fires can be quenched. Revival means showers pouring from Above. Showers can be wasted. Revival means rivers flowing from God. Rivers can be blocked. The Holy Spirit is the Author of revival and He can be resisted, grieved and quenched (1 Thess 5:19). J.B. Philips translates this as, "Never damp the fire of the Spirit!"

Several revivals of the past died out before accomplishing the purposes for which God sent them. Preservation of revival blessing is as important as the preparation for revival.

Pentecost was truly a revival because it was "a time of refreshing from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19). The Book of Acts begins with this revival and presents several important lessons how we can prevent the death of a revival. Here I explain seven of them. Why revival dies |

1. Idolisation

God uses human instruments of His choice in revival. We should not hero-worship them.

The man at the Beautiful gate but in an awful state presented a great challenge to Peter and John who had just experienced revival fires. God used Peter to perform an instant miracle on this born lame. Folks were greatly amazed and they ran to Peter and John. When Peter saw it he said, "Why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?" (Acts 3:12). Both the preachers and the people are responsible to see that no man is idolized.

Cornelius was a devout man of several plus points. He feared God "with all his household"; he gave alms "generously" to the people; he prayed to God "always." God answered his prayers and Heaven honoured his alms. But he still longed for more of God and godliness (Acts 10:2,4,33). Bled by the Spirit, Peter came to him to preach the Word. Quite unusual to the military way of saluting, Cornelius fell down at Peter's feet and worshipped him. But Peter lifted him up, saying, "Stand up; I myself am also a man" (v 26). The vehicle which brings God's blessing should not be worshipped. Peter rightly said, "I am also a man!"

God used Paul to heal a born cripple at Lystra. The people were highly excited and they shouted, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!" (Acts 14:11). They brought garlands for Paul and Barnabas and were even getting ready for sacrifices! The reaction of the apostles deserves our attention. They tore their clothes and cried out, "Men, Why are you doing these things?" (vv 14,15). God alone is worthy and we should never touch His glory.

Following a sermon, someone congratulated D. L. Moody, "What a speaker you are!" Moody was restless throughout

that night because this was the last thing he expected to happen. The Lord dealt with him and he preached again the next evening. The same man met Moody after the sermon and exclaimed, "What a Saviour we have!"

Let's protest all religious showmanship. God sends revival with a "concern for His holy Name!" He told the people of Israel, "I do not do this for your sake, but for My holy name's sake" (Ezek 36:21,22). God must be the centre of all attraction.

John was closer to Jesus than all the other disciples. Yet he found it so difficult to learn the truth that God alone is to be exalted and worshipped. Being excited over the prophetic revelations he received through the angel, he fell down and worshipped him. Poor thing, the angel had to teach John the kindergarten lesson, "Don't worship me, worship God!" (Rev 19:10). He repeated this blunder in the last chapter of the Bible also (22:8,9). Fortunately there is no 23rd chapter lest John worships the angel again! During times of revival when the Spirit is outpoured there may be several prophetic revelations. Beware of worshipping a prophet!

2. Denominationalisation

During revivals everybody is active. Lots of prayer meetings, Bible study, extended period of worship, new songs, new revelations, and so on and so forth! Everything may not appeal to everybody and so there may be some polarisation depending on the tastes of people for particular truths or experiences. If unchecked and not balanced, there will be exclusive emphases leading to extremism and eccentricity. The final result will be divisions and denominations.

In the vision of the valley of dry bones, where we have one of the best pictures of revival, one wonderful outcome

was bringing the two houses of Israel together. "They shall no longer be two nations, nor shall they ever be divided into two kingdoms again" (Ezek 37:12). God nominates, but man denominates. It's an abomination before God.

Divisions are sometimes around personalities. "I am of Paul... I am of Apollos... I am of Cephas..." And there is another group | it's an interdenominational denomination | "I am of Christ!" (1 Cor 1:11-13). Paul was perhaps well aware of this problem well ahead and that was why he didn't baptize too many people. Thank God for a preacher like Paul who did not keep a record of baptisms! "I do not know whether I baptized any other!" (v 16). If Jesus had baptized people, they would have claimed their baptism was superior to others. So He let His disciples do the baptizing (Jn 4:1,2). The Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away before he noted down the address of the eunuch he baptized! In all these, what a lesson for preachers with charisma!

Divisions may also be due to different doctrinal emphases. If baptism becomes everything you will end up starting the Baptist denomination. If you are always occupied with the doctrine of priesthood of all believers and that women should not speak in assemblies, you will become a Brethren denomination. And so on. Anything too much, however good, is not good. "Have you found honey? Eat only as you need, lest you be filled with it and vomit" (Prov 25:16).

Thirdly, divisions are caused by disputes and differences of opinion. The Holy Spirit has faithfully recorded how Paul and Barnabas separated from each other following a sharp contention (Acts 15:36-41). Both were anointed prophets, faithful teachers and committed missionaries. This incident is not meant to let us excuse our splits and separations on petty things. On the other hand this example is written for us lest we repeat this mistake. The failure of Israel is to serve as a warning, isn't it? (1 Cor 10:11).

The condition for continuous revival blessing is best stated in Psalm 133. God's people must live in unity and then the Lord will command His blessing forevermore! The secret of Pentecost was oneness, both before and after (Acts 2:1,46). There is no chorus more important to sing and practise than *Bind us together, Lord!*

3. Deviation

Any genuine revival will result in the ushering in of thousands of souls. Multiplication of the number of disciples will inevitably result in the multiplicity of problems too!

Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a murmuring against the Hebrews by the hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution, (Acts 6:1).

Here was the greatest temptation for the apostles to be deviated from their primary calling. But they wisely overcame the situation. They said, It is not right that we should have to neglect preaching the Word of God in order to look after the accounts. You, our brothers must look around and pick out from your number seven men of good reputation who are both practical and spiritually-minded and we will put them in charge of this matter. Then we shall devote ourselves whole-heartedly to prayer and the ministry of the Word, (vv 3,4 JBP).

Oh, how many Indian pastors and preachers have fallen a victim to the American dollar and the German mark! I believe in orphanages and similar institutions of social service. But it is not for pastors and preachers, whose primary calling is to pray, preach and prepare the people of God to present them perfect before the Lord, to manage these institutions and steal away the precious hours meant

to be spent in their prayer closet and study. The orphanage explosion in India has only left us with overfed shepherds and underfed sheep!

Ministers of the Word should learn to entrust to other responsible men the business matters and the social activities. We can't excuse ourselves saying we don't have trustworthy men. Did not Jesus give the treasury to Judas whom He knew was a thief? Did not Jesus give the keys to Peter who was known for his unsteadiness and weakness? People grow when they are trusted. We don't need to be unduly cautious. At the maximum they can run away with the money, not our ministry!

When I say this, there are pastors and preachers who immediately think of giving the treasury to their wives and the management to their sons! Even Solomon in all his wisdom, I don't think, could have invented such a solution!

Revival increases the thirst and intensifies the hunger for God and His Word among His people. Let the ministers of God spend maximum time in the presence of God to speak in the light what God tells them in the dark, (Mt 10:27). This way the revival flames will be further fanned.

4. Liberalisation

When the Holy Spirit is outpoured in revival blessing, the devil releases the hellish spirits also! Both lilies and tares spring up following a thunder shower. It was right when and where our first parents were enjoying the blissful presence of God and walking with Him, the glittering serpent entered. Visions, dreams, prophesies and such sensational experiences are common during revival and the devil takes advantage of the situation. He will stealthily and subtly inject his venom into people's minds causing them to dilute or adulterate God's pure doctrine. Instead of testing every

experience in the light of the truth, experiences will be claimed infallibility and truths will be deduced from therein. It is no more truth to experience but vice versa.

Following the Pentecostal outpouring we read that the believers continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine (Acts 2:42). Three other things are mentioned here but doctrine comes first. Because that is the sure foundation against the dashing floods and beating winds (Mt 7:24,25). The result was a holy fear on every soul and many wonders and signs through the apostles! (Acts 2:43). The revival kept spreading.

Certain men from Judea taught the believers they must be circumcised. The apostles and elders greatly agitated against this wind of false doctrine. The entire Church came together and unitedly put off this strange fire (Acts 15:1,2,22,30-32). In the heat of revival, folks may suddenly come up with so-called 'new' revelations and 'deeper' truths! All that sounds spiritual need not be scriptural. The ministers of the Word should be on the alert to distil away all questionable and extra-Biblical revelations. After all the enemy does not come in black with horns and a tail but in sheep's clothing as an angel of light. Teachers of the Word should be smart enough to take immediate action against anything that's contrary to sound doctrine.

Following an outpouring in Ephesus there erupted a wrong teaching. Paul immediately withdrew the disciples and gave them daily Bible study for two years! The result | All in Asia heard the Word... God worked unusual miracles... The Word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed (Acts 19:6-11,20).

I have witnessed the enthusiastic beginning of several groups and ministries in the wake of revival but dying out as fast as they sprang up. The postmortem has shown the lack of Bible teaching.

We are to be armed against not only the dilution of doctrine but also looseness in life. Revival is not mainly to make us happy but holy. Happiness is only the byproduct of holiness. Revival is not the top blowing off but the bottom falling out, said Darrel Bridges. And Roy Hession wrote, Revival is not going down the street with a big drum; it is going back to Calvary with a big sob!

The early Church leaders kept warning the congregations against all sexual immorality (Acts 15:29). The Corinthian Church was experiencing all the charismatic blessings but Paul warned them, 'Your glorying is not good!'. Instead of mourning over the sexual immorality that was reported among them they were boasting of themselves (1 Cor 1:5,7; 5:1-6). The Church is the House of God and our body is the Temple of the Holy Spirit. The rivers from God's throne must sweep them clean. Dead flies putrefy the ointment! (Eccl 10:1).

5. Commercialisation

Miracles, signs and wonders will be plenty when God visits His people in revival power. Men with such gifts will be believed and obeyed unquestioningly for what all they say. The preachers may take advantage of the situation and make a business out of it. Religion will be commercialized. Huge sums of money will be raised for the pet projects and self-glorifying programmes of the preachers. Also moneyed people will woo and attract gifted preachers to bless their corrupt businesses. Special prayers will be promised for special offering. This is similar to the forgiveness tickets sold by the Pope for building fund. There will be all kinds of business around the 'anointed oil' and 'blessed handkerchief'. Let's beware of attaching any kind and form of price tag to healing. Jesus said, 'Heal the sick... Freely you have received, freely give' (Mt 10:8).

There was great joy in the city of Samaria when many were baptized, miracles happened, unclean spirits were cast out and the Holy Spirit was poured out on people. When Simon saw all these things, he offered the apostles money for the gift of impartation. Peter rebuked him, 'Your money perish with you!' (Acts 8:5-21). Observe the strict attitude of the apostles in money matters. Covetousness has been one of the primary causes for the fall of many a mighty servant of God.

In the second chapter of Acts we find people laying all their wealth at the apostles' feet. But in the next chapter Peter says, 'Silver and gold I do not have!' How come? Yes, the apostles kept the money at their feet, and not in their fist! That's the right place to keep money. Underfoot! That's how it is in Heaven. Gold underfoot!

It is money for ministry and not ministry for money. This should not be reversed. Covetousness kills revival.

6. Mechanisation

The work-load increases as the ministry expands under revival. Everything becomes mechanical. The refreshing enthusiasm gives way to dull routine. There is a loss of freshness in prayer, praise, preaching and counselling. The excitement and feeling is no more there. Quality is sacrificed for quantity. We get accustomed to spiritual things. The spontaneity is missing. These are the 'perils' of expansion.

God has not left us without solution. The preacher or the leader should not try to hold all the strings in his hand. The principle taught to Moses by his father-in-law should be put at work. 'Select able men... to be rulers of thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens... Every great matter they shall bring to you, but every small matter they themselves shall judge. So it will be easier for you, for they will bear the burden with you' (Ex 18:17-24).

Computerised counselling is not God's method. Printed letters have their place but God has personal interest in each individual. David exclaimed, 'The Lord is my Shepherd! Distribution of work and delegation of responsibilities are Biblical principles.'

An Indian lady wrote to an American evangelist asking for details to go around his headquarters to see the facilities because she was intending to go to the United States as a tourist. She got a reply letter from the evangelist, 'We are praying for your problems. God will soon deliver you!' This lady is none other than my mother-in-law.

Hectic activities and increased work-load are no excuse for the loss of personalised attention with love and feelings of compassion (1 Cor 13:1-3; Rev 2:3-5). No one can be busier than Jesus and Paul. Both of them took time for individuals. The Spirit is grieved when men are dealt with by machinery.

7. Stagnation

After rich revival blessings we sometimes feel having 'arrived!' Someone said, 'Christians go through three stages | Salvation, Satisfaction and Stagnation! Revival is showers. It's a fire. It's rivers. None of these is static. They are moving forces. They are kinetic. Revival is meant to carry us higher and higher, deeper and deeper, nearer and nearer. We must keep on hungering and thirsting after God, His Word and His Righteousness.'

We should never let our denominational restrictions hinder the free flow of God's Spirit. We should be available for any adjustment and alteration in our structure to accommodate what God does. Our wineskins must be capable of expanding with the fermentation process of Heaven's wine.

Stagnation in life is dangerous. Backsliding begins when forwarding stops. He who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still. (Rev 22:11).

The disciples prayed both before and after Pentecost. Revival is not the end.

Nathanael was excited when Jesus told him of His foreknowledge concerning him. He exclaimed, You are the King! But Jesus said, You will see greater things than these! (Jn 1:47-51). Having tasted the former rain, we should seek after the latter rain! (Joel 2:23). God will fill the hungry with good things, but the rich (satisfied) He will send away empty (Lk 1:53). God does not want to give us His Spirit by measure.

Revival stops when God's people consciously or unconsciously say, Enough! Can we afford to say we have had enough? We have not yet seen every Church and denomination shaken up by God's power. We have not yet gone to the ends of the earth. We have not yet translated the Bible into about 2000 languages. We not only need another Pentecost but a greater Pentecost | at any cost!

Francis Schaeffer, that great Christian thinker, said, if we do not make clear by word and practice our position *for* truth *and* against false doctrine, we are building a wall between the next generation and the gospel!

The very first message of Paul to Timothy was, Command... men not to teach FALSE DOCTRINES, (1 Tim 1:3). And his closing prediction in his second epistle, The time will come when men will not put up with SOUND DOCTRINE. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths, (2 Tim 4:3,4). Has not this time already upon us?

There were four secrets for the bursting growth of the early Church. Of these the first one was its steadfast continuance in the apostles' doctrine, (Acts 2:42). To say, Never mind doctrine, let's get on with evangelism, is as ridiculous as a football team saying, Never mind the ball, let's get on with the game! Peter Lewis said this.

The New Testament speaks of false prophets (Mt 24:24), false apostles (2 Cor 11:13), false brothers (Gal 2:4) and false teachers (2 Pet 2:1). We are called to test *everything*.

Test *all things*; hold fast *what* is good. Abstain from *every* form of evil, (1 Thess 5:21,22). Test! Trust! Thrust! The acid test of any doctrine is its fruit, outcome or result. For a good tree does not bear bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. For every tree is known by its *fruit*, (Lk 6:43,44). We are not only to test the teaching but also the teachers.

Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the Word of God to you; whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct, (Heb 13:7).

I have a check-list of seven tests which I apply on any teaching or ministry before I embrace it.

1. Does this doctrine or ministry speak of salvation by grace or works?

This is the most fundamental issue. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast, (Eph 2:8,9). We are saved not *of* works but *for* works. Don't put the cart before the horse!

Let me give a few examples of the teaching which emphasizes *works*, for salvation. I once met a young man with a senior brother and asked the former whether he was saved. The latter answered for him, *He is on his way to the cross!* I asked, *How long?* He said, *Three months.* What he meant was, this young man was going about reconciling with all whom he had wronged and restituting matters and he was confessing *all* his sins committed from childhood *one by one!* He was not through yet! There would come a time when this senior brother would tell him, *Now that you have confessed all sins and made all necessary restitutions, you can start praying for salvation!* Beloved, restitution with men is definitely a Biblical doctrine but it is more an

evidence than a condition for salvation. Anyone can be saved in an instant. The Publican entered the temple as a sinner and he exited as a saint | *justified!*

Still there are others who quote Matthew 28:19 and say that only *disciples* must be baptized. Their definition of a disciple is one who has fulfilled all the conditions of discipleship laid in the New Testament. But the basic meaning of the word *disciple* is a student or an adherent. That means he has joined Jesus to learn from and follow Him. Whether you are in the kindergarten or the post-graduate class, you are a student! So the three commandments in the Great Commission (Mt 28:19,20) are Enroll, Baptize and Educate!

Sometimes folks make baptism a condition for salvation. We are saved by faith, and faith alone, on the finished work of Christ. Baptism follows this as an outward expression of the inward experience.

Salvation on God's side is all of *grace*, and on our side all of *faith*. Beware of any addition or subtraction!

2. Does this doctrine lead to liberty or bondage?

Stand fast in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage, (Gal 5:1). Comparing with the heavy yoke of the law of Moses, Jesus said, *My yoke is easy and My burden is light,* (Mt 11:28-30). There are usually three areas where legalistic preachers bring God's people into bondage.

a. Days

For Christians there is no law of observance of any day or days. When the Galatian believers were seduced to add the Old Testament laws of observance of days to their

Christian faith, Paul rebuked them saying, But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? You observe days and months and seasons and years (Gal 4:9,10). Some Christians think that in the OT the Sabbath was Saturday and now it is Sunday! No! There is no law for Christians to keep any day. We are free to observe or not to observe any day. If we observe, it is to the Lord; if we don't observe also, it is to the Lord! (Rom 14:5,6a). Shout Hallelujah for this glorious liberty! However, keeping one of the seven days of the week exclusively for the things of the Lord to honour Him has a great sanctifying value.

b. Diet

The dietary regulations of the OT are not binding on us under the New Covenant. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks! (Rom 14:6b). A woman preacher a few years ago came up with a revelation that those who desire to participate in the first resurrection should not eat meat or sweet or savouries! Beloved, Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For it is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them (Heb 13:9).

c. Dress

There is nothing wrong to dress fashionably if it is modest. A friend almost shouted at me how as a preacher I could wear bell-bottom! I said it was comfortable but he wouldn't accept. I saw him in bell-bottom after two years when narrow trousers became fashionable! In the eyes of some who use only face powder, a woman with lipstick looks an awful sinner! What they fail to understand is while face powder

improves the look of the facial skin, the lipstick improves that of the lips. Dyeing the hair or wearing of jewels is considered sin in some assemblies. Again for some people putting on actual flowers is sin whereas they find nothing wrong in wearing a flowered saree or dress! After all one is 3-dimensional and the other 2-dimensional! One is actual and the other artificial! Beware of building doctrines around issues which must be left to the discretion of individuals.

Watchman Nee said, Legalism is bound to produce pride of heart. How true!

3. Does this doctrine lead to holiness or careless living?

If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the **doctrine** which is according to **godliness**, he is proud, knowing nothing... From such withdraw yourself (1 Tim 6:3-5).

The great men of God of old were those who understood that true doctrine always led to holy living. The purpose behind all doctrines is to secure moral action, said A. W. Tozer. Loose theology leads to loose morality, said R. A. Torrey. Doctrine is not an affair of the tongue but of the life, stressed John Calvin.

God's will for us is to grow in holiness. He who is holy, let him be holy still (Rev 22:11). An unholy Christian is a contradiction of everything the Bible teaches.

After hearing a preacher or reading a book, I check whether my hunger for holiness and thirst for truthfulness has increased. The Word of God is sharper than a two-edged sword to sever and remove filth from our soul. The Word of God warns us of and cleanses us from errors... secret faults... presumptuous sins... great transgression (Psa 19:13).

False teachers kill the fear of the Lord in people's hearts and lead them to sinful licence in the name of spiritual liberty. A Christian is not free to please himself but to please God! Some preachers emphasize on *what*, rather than *how*. For them the end justifies the means. All kinds of corruptive practices in Christian ministries result from such insincere teaching. Beloved, holiness is costly. And preachers of holiness are becoming rare because it is no more popular to preach sanctification and self-denial. Programmes aim at making people happy rather than holy. But there are *a few*, even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments! They are a significant minority! Join them!

4. Does this doctrine emphasize the Scriptures or just feelings and experiences?

Growth in Christian life means growing in faith. The Tabernacle presents a beautiful portrait. There is sunlight in the outer court, candle light in the inner court and no light in the innermost place or the Holy of Holies. One cannot walk by sight but only by faith in the All Holy Place (2 Cor 5:7).

Apostle Peter had the most exciting experience of being with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration and witnessing the descent of glory on Him and hearing the voice of the Father. But in order to prove Christ's Messiahship he places the *more sure*, word of the prophetic Scriptures above all visions and voices (2 Pet 1:16-21). There are simply too many preachers today claiming *infallibility*, of their visions and voices and so-called transports to heaven and they almost threaten people of divine judgment and displeasure if they don't believe them. On the other hand look at the humility of a man like Paul, with all his visions and revelations. See how many times he says, *I do not know, God knows; I do not know, God knows!* And his boasting was in his *infirmities, reproaches, needs, prosecutions, distresses*

and weaknesses!

 (2 Cor 12:1-11). His conclusion was, *I am-nothing!* I would rather follow such a man than the many arrogant boasters on modern pulpits.

Our God is a God of miracles and we do need and have signs and wonders today. But Martin Luther said, Any teaching which does not square with the Scriptures is to be rejected even if it showers miracles every day! Prophecy is a gift of the Holy Spirit but no prophecy should be accepted before it is *judged*, as to its agreement with the teaching of the Scriptures (1 Cor 14:29). I believe in visions and voices though I never had one or heard one, but I place them only next to the written Word of God (Jer 23:28,29).

5. Does this doctrine lead to worship the greatness of God or emphasize the importance of man?

The very first temptation to man was, *You will be like God*, (Gen 3:5). Though Satan has changed his methods his primary temptation is still the same. Remember the underlying note of all the three recorded temptations of Jesus was just the same?

Examples of this false teaching of man-centred religion are numerous. Questioning God is one example. Whatever may happen to us we cannot ask God *Why?* God is not obliged to answer us. He will simply ask, *Why not?* Similarly we can never *command* God. The Bible nowhere teaches us that we can order Him. We can only pray and plead. Isaiah 45:11 is misinterpreted. The right translation is, *Do you give Me orders about the work of My hand?* (NIV). This agrees with the rest of the verses in this passage. Read it carefully. As God's children we of course have the privilege to *claim*, our rightful blessings, but that too because of the merits of Calvary. I have heard preachers tell people, *The miracle is in your mouth!* I don't believe this. The miracle is in God's hand. He may choose to do or not do it! He is Sovereign! Beware of such cut-to-size theology!

Any teaching that emphasizes the blessing, rather than enthroning the Blessor, is defective. Isaac was Abraham's laughter. He and Sarah were rejoicing over the son of their old age. They were perhaps preoccupied, with him. God demanded him to be offered on the altar. It was when Abraham stretched the lad on the altar he saw the Lamb yonder. Now it's no more the blessing, but the Blessor!

It was God who crowned the twentyfour elders but they threw the crowns at His feet who alone was worthy. John the Baptist was a true prophet and his doctrine was, *I-must-decrease-He-must-increase!* Apostle Paul was a true teacher and his doctrine was, *I-die-daily!*

6. Does this teaching lead me to active evangelism or slothful settlement?

The work of any minister, whether an apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor or teacher, is to prepare God's people for works of service; (Eph 4:11,12). Doctrine without duty is a tree without fruit; duty without doctrine is a tree without roots, said Talbot Chambers.

Christ came into the world to save sinners. The Holy Spirit came to empower saints to witness to sinners. The most important item on God's agenda today is that the Gospel must be preached in all the nations so the end will come! The last call in the Bible is evangelistic: Come, Drink!; (Rev 22:17).

Beware of preachers and teachers who directly or indirectly demotivate evangelism. There are two doctrines twisted to quench the fires of soulwinning. One is the doctrine of Predestination and the other the doctrine of Perfection. The former says that God knows who all will be saved and He would somehow save them and there's not much we can do about it. But Paul said, God desires all men to be saved, and we are to supplicate, pray, intercede and give thanks for

all, men (1 Tim 2:1-4). We are to sow in the morning and not stop in the evening. We must share with seven and also eight. For we know not which will prosper! (Eccl 11:1-6).

The doctrine of Perfection tells folks, Why go to preach others when you haven't become perfect yet? The fact is no one becomes perfect here on earth. Apostle James, that practical man, said, We ALL stumble in MANY things!; (Js 3:2). All the disciples who went all over the world were imperfect. None of the missionaries who came to India from the West was perfect. Praise God they refused to hear the Perfection teachers of their countries but came to India so my great grandfather could be converted from idols to serve the living God so I had the privilege of being born in a Christian home!

The concern of Jesus was always the other sheep, and the other cities. Let's embrace this mind of Christ and eject any message that contradicts. Don't have the slightest interest in a theology which does not evangelize!

7. Does this teaching or ministry lead to spiritual unity or sinful seclusion?

Again the purpose of all ministries in the Church is to help saints keep the unity of the Spirit and bring them to the unity of the faith (Eph 4:3,13). Jesus prayed, I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one; (Jn 17:20,21).

Divisions are usually around personalities. Of Paul... of Apollos... of Cephas!; Then there will be a fourth group | of Christ. Interdenominational?! God nominated the Church after Christ and man has denominating it! Denominationalism is sin. There are preachers who outrightly condemn denominationalism but ultimately condescend to form their own denomination with the dissidents and defectors of other denominations! The process goes on and on!

Divisions are also caused by certain doctrinal emphases. Certain portions of the whole truth or counsel of God are emphasized at the cost of the other aspects of the truth. Extremism leads to eccentricity and that to sectarianism. The balance is lost. Have you found honey? Eat only as much as you need, lest you be filled with it and vomit! (Prov 25:16). A good advice, isn't it?

History is full of examples of extremism leading to denominationalism. All the time you talk about baptism and you end up with the Baptist denomination. You keep on talking against women speaking in the church and you get the Brethren denomination. Always Tongues, Tongues, Tongues, you get the Pentecostal denomination. Sabbath, Sabbath, Sabbath... Seventh Day Adventist! And so on!

Once upon a time five blind men felt an elephant and told what it was. One man said it was a wall. The other, it was a rope... I'm sorry, you know the story! Forget it not!

কণ্ঠ তন কামপুত্তৈত্ত্বং তঞ্জবৎসং
বন্তে ভুজ্বলং

It's sickening to read the daily newspaper. The headlines are about violence, clashes, disaster, corruption and war. We are living much nearer to the end of endtime than the early Christians. If Peter referred to the Day of Pentecost as the fast days, we are in the last minutes. Things go from bad to worse. All hopes are fading. World leaders are turning pessimistic. Hearts are failing. The very thought of tomorrow is terrorizing.

But he who has taken sides with God by believing on Christ need not panic. Amidst all storms and tempest he is anchored and secure. The turn of world events doesn't surprise him. All he sees and hears is but the fulfilment of Bible prophecies. In the last days perilous times will come (2 Tim 3:1).

God is in control. He is on the Throne. Jesus is the Lord of lords and the King of kings. God knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment (2 Pet 2:9). He has taught us in the Scriptures how to survive these evil days.

1. Spare no pains to live HOLY.

As the world becomes filthier and filthier God commands His people to become holier and holier (Rev 22:11). We should never slow down our pursuit of holiness. Robert Murray M. Cheyne prayed, "Lord, make me as holy as a pardoned sinner can be!"

Those who came out of Egypt perished in the wilderness because of lust for evil things, idolatry, sexual immorality, testing God and murmuring. Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our instruction, on whom the ends of the ages have come (1 Cor 10:6-11).

Temptations abound. The very air is becoming sin-toxic. But for every temptation God has provided a way of escape (1 Cor 10:13). His grace is sufficient for any situation. God works in us and we are to work with Him as well (Phil 2:12,13). Let's not blame the circumstances or the society. Joseph lived holy in Egypt. Daniel lived holy in Babylon. Dare to stand against the tide. It's not easy but not impossible.

Everyone-does-it is the common excuse. But are we not "a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people?" (1 Pet 2:9). We are called to be "blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation," among whom we are to "shine as lights" (Phil 2:15).

Our cities are becoming like Sodom and Gomorrah. Sin is the fashion. God's destruction of these two cities is "an example to those who afterward would live ungodly" (2 Pet 2:6). The challenge: "What manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness?" (2 Pet 3:11).

The secret of holy living is in the mind: a transformed mind that refuses to be conformed to the standards and trend of the

world (Rom 12:2). Keep the mind ever under the Blood. Don't entertain the suggestive thoughts of the Tempter. Take refuge under the shade of Almighty. Run into His name and be safe.

Take time to be holy. So sang the old saint William Longstaff in the 18th century. Set aside a few minutes everyday to consider your ways and claim God's cleansing and power.

2. Set aside definite times for PRAYER.

In His discourses on the endtime Jesus emphasized watchfulness in prayer. "Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is" (Mk 13:33; Mt 25:13).

The world is busier than ever. In spite of so many modern gadgets to do things faster, we don't have as much spare time as our forebears. Everyday it's hectic. The victim is always the prayer time. We try to manage with short and sweet prayers! Beloved, if we are too busy to pray, then we are too busy.

Martin Luther testified, "If I fail to spend two hours in prayer each morning, the devil gets the victory through the day." As our work increases so should our prayer time. Because, more prayer means more power, more strength and more wisdom. It is unwise to sacrifice prayer for work, secular or sacred. It's in prayer we learn to do things God's way.

God's children are the target of the devil. Even with the whole armour of God, we cannot "stand," firm without the underlying power of "praying always... being watchful" (Eph 6:11-18). There is no other way we can withstand the fiery darts of the "evil day."

Unless we set aside definite times for prayer, we will never make it. We will never *have* time, we must *find* it. Who was

busier than King David in his time? Yet he had definite prayer times daily (Psa 55:17). Daniel was busy serving King Nebuchadnezzar. Whatever the situation, he never missed his three-times-a-day prayer (Dan 6:10). Let's get addicted to such prayer habits.

Because it is usually quite difficult to find an unhurried hour for prayer during daytime in these busy days, we must set aside early hours of the day for the same. This was the practice of Jesus since folks were flocking Him from dawn to dusk (Mk 1:35).

The enemy keeps devising new strategies to draw us from faith and drown us in filth. Prayer is the antidote. Failure on knees makes us succumb to his every assault. Jesus taught us to pray, Deliver us from evil.

3. Saturate yourself with the WORD.

The warfare intensifies as this age comes to a close. For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time (Rev 12:12). The Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God is the only offensive weapon in the Christian's armour (Eph 6:17).

Making God's people doubt His Word has been the devil's constant attempt since time immemorial (Gen 3:1). With the increase of knowledge he uses science and technology to shake up the simple faith of Christians in the Bible. The Bible is not a science book but all true science agrees with it. Man-made theories come and go but the Word of God abides forever (1 Pet 1:24,25).

Young and old everywhere complain of tension, a word scarcely known earlier when life was simple. Tranquillity comes through the Word of God. The Word is true... noble... just...

pure... lovely... of good report... virtuous... praiseworthy. When we soak our mind in it, the peace of God and the God of peace are ours! (Phil 4:7-9).

Problems and worries multiply in alarming proportions in all spheres of life. Days are becoming gloomier and gloomier | even before the sun has turned into darkness and the moon into blood! (Acts 2:20). The Psalmist comes with a time-tested remedy for our malady: Unless Your Law had been my delight, I would then have perished in my affliction... Your Statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage (Psa 119:92,54).

The floods come and the winds blow. Yet once more God is shaking the earth and the heaven that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. Unless our life and work are founded on the solid rock of God's Word, great will be the fall (Mt 7:24-27; Heb 12:25-27).

The serpent is pouring forth a flood of false doctrines on the earth. The counter-attack is by the Word of God and Prayer (1 Tim 4:1-5). The time has come when men do not endure sound doctrine but prefer fables to facts (2 Tim 4:1-14). We are to keep on practising and preaching the Word.

The solution to all our problems | spiritual, social or political | is in the Bible. The Bible never grows old. The Bible among books is what Christ is among men. The Bible is not only the Book of God but also the god of books.

4. Save your FAMILY.

Family is God's eternal idea. It's God's basic unit of creation. The devil is all out to destroy it. More and more families are breaking up. Covenant relationships vanish. Spouses grow impatient and irritated with each other. Children turn bitter against parents. These are endtime signals as the following passages indicate.

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to the fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse (Mal 4:5,6). These last verses of the Old Testament speak of the restorative ministry of the Holy Spirit in the last days.

Know this, that in the last days perilous times will come; For men will be lovers of themselves... disobedient to parents... without natural affection (2 Tim 3:1-3).

Follow these simple guidelines for family survival /

Husband and wife should consistently grow in mutual love and respect by spending quality time with each other. Pray, meditate the Bible and enjoy things together. True love means faithfulness, forgiveness and forbearance. Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 together frequently for retrospect and renewal.

Parents should be models than masters to the children. Children should not be threatened or over-corrected. Parents must become friends to the children. The husband should not dump on the wife all the responsibility of child-rearing and training. Scripturally the responsibility is largely on fathers (Eph 6:4). Nowadays parents give their children everything except themselves. This is sure to bring disaster.

"Family prayer should not be sacrificed for anything. Throw away the television or any pastime which steals away the family prayer time. The family altar would alter many a family! John Wesley testified that he learnt more about Christianity from his mother than from all the theologians of England.

Let us parents claim this endtime promise for our children: In the last days, says God, I will pour out of My Spirit on

all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions (Acts 2:17).

A happy family is but an earlier heaven!

5. Submit to ONE ANOTHER.

Because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold (Mt 24:12).

Distrust, disunity, deceit and defections are the order of the day. Selfishness and subtleness characterize dealings and relationships. Hypocrisy instead of honesty. Treachery instead of transparency. People don't believe one another. Suspicion underscores transactions. This is not just the picture of the world but that of the Church as well. We address the latter here.

The Church is a Kingdom. If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. The Church is a House. If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand (Mk 3:24,25). What of us? Divided we stand?

See then that you walk carefully... because the days are evil... submitting to one another in the fear of God (Eph 5:15,16,21).

Do not grumble against one another, brothers, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door! (Js 5:9).

And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works... exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching (Heb 10:24,25).

There is no point talking about Millennium when the world is desperately looking to the Church for an answer | today.

Someone said we are a sick Church in a dying world. Are we not the salt of the earth? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another; (Mk 9:50).

Gather regularly with the local Christians. Maintain a genuine spirit of fellowship. Pray for one another with a real concern. Away with lip service. Do positive good. Put your faith into action. Bear one another's burdens. Rejoice with those who rejoice. Weep with those who weep. Share material and spiritual blessings. Forgive one another. Stop backbiting. Refuse tale-bearing. Don't uncover others' faults. Let the world know we are Christians by our love. It's good to sing, *Bind us together, Lord*. But we must strive for the same. Tolerate the imperfections in others. Who is not imperfect? If you are in a leadership position, don't boss but bless.

The end of all things is at hand; therefore... above all things have fervent love for one another... Be hospitable to one another without grumbling; (1 Pet 4:7-9).

6. Set your mind on HEAVENLY THINGS.

Too heavenly-minded to be of any earthly use, or too earthly-minded to be of any heavenly use? I believe the latter is true of us.

We used to talk about the misery of poverty. Now it is the misery of plenty. The rich are not happy. Riches are like sea water. The more one drinks it the thirstier he becomes. But men have not become wise enough to stop chasing this wind. God's Word says, 'Godliness with contentment is great gain; (1 Tim 6:6).

Do not overwork to be rich; Because of your own understanding, cease! Will you set your eyes on that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away like an eagle; (Prov 23:4,5).

A man caught up with this world is not ready for the next. The Lord's Coming is imminent. Let's take this into account in all our planning. They are the enemies of the Cross of Christ... who set their mind on earthly things. For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ; (Phil 3:18-20).

If the Lord has given us more than what we need, it is meant to be passed on to those who are in need. Here's a command to the rich: 'Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come; (1 Tim 6:17-19). Let's not leave our money with the Antichrist!

7. Seek to win the LOST at any cost.

The Gospel of Christ is the ultimate answer. The message of the Prince of Peace must be heralded. Apostle Paul dauntlessly proclaimed the gospel everywhere, be it the religious Jerusalem or the political Rome or the intellectual Corinth. So should we all over our country and the world.

The coming of the Lord is delayed just to give an opportunity to everyone to hear the gospel and come to repentance (2 Pet 3:9). When the gospel is preached in all the world, then the end will come (Mt 24:14).

Be a personal witness for Christ wherever you are, whatever your occupation. Identify with people in their needs and problems. Present Christ as the Answer. Be not ashamed to share the gospel. It's the only Way. The Cross is God's plus sign for a world of sin, sickness and sadness. We cannot bring the whole world to Christ, but we must bring Christ to the whole world.

Involve yourself freely in the activities of evangelistic ministries and missionary organisations. Support them with

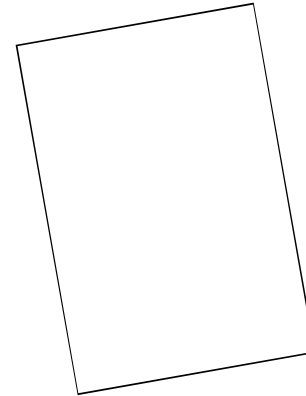
your prayers. Contribute liberally to their needs. Do your maximum.

Consider seriously to invest all your time in the missionary cause. David Brainerd testified, 'I cared not where or how I lived, or what hardships I went through, so that I could but gain souls for Christ.'

Society is decaying. We are the salt. The world is submerging in darkness. We are the light (Mt 5:13,14).

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